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# POCKET NOVELS



## The Island Trapper.





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# THE ISLAND TRAPPER;

OR,

## THE YOUNG WHITE-BUFFALO HUNTERS.

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BY. CAPT. CHAS. HOWARD,

*Author of the following Pocket Novels:*

5. THE ELK KING.

50. THE WOLF QUEEN.

52. THE MAD CHIEF.

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# FRONTIER SHACK,

## THE ISLAND TRAPPER.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE YOUNG ADVENTURERS.

"WHOA!"

The command was spoken in a low tone to a majestic iron-gray horse.

Instantly the fore-feet were plunged into the loose earth, and the animal became as stationary as a bronze statue.

"Dash me! if I didn't hear music. Tecumseh, ye heard it, too, for I saw ye prick yer ears before I told ye to stop. Where is the white man who has the audacity to be musical in the Pawnee country? Dash me! I'd like to see him; I'd like to take 'im back to the States and present 'im to Mr. Barnum. Listen! there it goes again. Music, certain, no mistake, and it sounds like that which I've heard on Broadway, comin' from the dirty hand-organs."

With a smile on his broad, handsome countenance, the speaker leaned forward in the wooden stirrups, with a half-doubled hand behind his left ear.

"He's struck up a new tune, and dash me if it isn't 'Hail Columbia.' I'm gettin' uncommon curious, settin' here on Tecumseh, and list'nin' to the first genuine music I've heard for five years, and dash me if— Injun yells, by Joshua!"

The iron-gray heard the new sounds, which seemed to emanate from the same spot as the mysterious music, and turned his head to his master, as if to ask what they meant. A furious light flashed from his dark eyes, and a low neigh told how eager he was to court excitement.

"Steady, Tecumseh, steady!" whispered the frontiersman



"The Injun yells come from the same spot as the music ; but still, 'Hail Columbia' remains unbroken. I can't stand it any longer. Dash me if I ain't goin' to inquire into that music. The old song goes all over me like an electric arrow, and I b'lieve it affects my old horse. Now, Tecumseh, for'ard !"

With the last word the horseman settled back into the saddle, and the steed bounded off like a frightened stag.

Down the right bank of the Pawnee Loup the twain flew, through the soft gloaming of that delightful May day, 1815.

The horse and his rider were well mated. Both possessed courage, strength and true nobleness of character, the brute none less than his master.

The occupant of the blanketed saddle was a medium-sized man, about forty years of age. His hair, and he had an ocean of it, was an iron-gray, and shone like silver. The face was smooth, somewhat cadaverous, but healthy ; and the brownish eyes, nestling between long, dark lashes, were indicative alike of gentleness and determination. He wore the often-described habiliments of the Western hunter, and in addition to the long-barreled rifle that lay across the pommel of his saddle, supported in its position by a great hand, the only ill-proportioned member of the body, a brace of Colt's large revolvers protruded from his buck-skin belt.

"Tecumseh, if ye see danger afore Shack does, stop," he said, as they neared the mouth of the Nebraska's tributary. "We're gettin' close to the place now. I hev'n't heard the red devils for some time ; but the music keeps up mighty well. He's got out a new tune now—a tune which the lame old Italian used to grind out before the 'Arcade'—a tune which nobody in creation could tell the name of. Wonder if that old chap hesn't come out here to amuse the Pawnee Loups ? If he hes—"

The sentence was broken by Tecumseh's abrupt halt, and the frontiersman spoke a few words which effectually quieted the steed's nervousness.

"It's jest over the rise, thar, on the Oregon trail," muttered Frontier Shack, glancing at his revolvers and lifting the deadly rifle from the saddle. "The Injuns hev played smash with another lot of poor emigrants. Twas but yesterday that they butchered everybody in Davidson's train, and now they've



made new rivers of blood ! Dash me if these things don't rile me ; they run through my marrow like fiery arrows, and if the Gov'ment would appoint Ote Shackelford Injun agent, the Oregon trail would soon be as safe as Broadway. But for'ard, Tecumseh, slowly, slowly, horse."

The faithful steed now walked cautiously toward a knoll well defined against the darkening horizon, and when the summit had almost been gained, a word from his master caused him to pause.

"I'll be back presently, horse," he said, in low tones, as he dismounted and crept forward.

His ears were saluted by coarse but not unpleasant music, as he executed the movement, and he knew that it emanated from a hand-organ not far from the opposite foot of the knoll, and between him and the Nebraska or Platte. The night was still, and the stars were beginning to appear in the boundless firmament above the treeless river. A light breeze blew from the water, and wafted the strains toward the northern lodges of the Pawnees, between which and the river they had encountered the frontiersman.

Frontier Shack reached the summit of the hillock, and peered over toward the stream.

"Well, this beats any thing *I've* seen since I've been in the West !" he ejaculated, a moment later. "That's what I call pursuin' music under difficulties. That young chap handles the crank well, but he's almost played out, and his friend can't dance much longer. Dash me if I didn't get here in the nick of time ; there's goin' to be some new tunes played now—new tunes, by Joshua !"

A moment later the scout rose and walked back to his untethered and impatient horse, and while he is examining the priming of his weapons, let us introduce the reader to the scene near the base of the hillock.

Seated about a fire lately kindled, more for light than heat, for the air was not uncomfortable, though sharp, were perhaps fifteen Indians—Pawnee Loups. Their arms lay at their sides, and proclaimed that they were not dreaming of the presence of an enemy. Fresh scalps dangled from the belts of the younger warriors, and a close observer would have detected blood on their hatchets and bows.



The scalps, the blood and their prisoners told, in silent but unmistakable language, the fate of an emigrant train.

The marauders' captives were two youths, neither beyond seventeen, fair-skinned and handsome, and bore a striking resemblance to one another.

Their garments were of the latest cut in the States, but quite serviceable for the wilds of the West. They also proclaimed that they were not the sons of ordinary emigrants, who, unable to thrive among the populous lands of the East, were seeking homes, Boone-like, beyond the verge of civilization. Their faces betokened intelligence, and a bravery suited to the land and times they were in.

One stood near the fire, turning, with a strange desperation, the crank of a new hand-organ, such as the beggarly sons of Italy grind on the streets of our metropolis to-day. Long playing had almost exhausted him, his cheeks were flushed with fever, his breathing came by gasps, and great blue veins stood forth on his hands and forehead like whip-cords. He partially leaned against the organ for support, and his eyes were upturned to a great red star that seemed to pity him from the heavens. His companion was dancing for dear life near by, ready to sink to the ground, and die beneath the reeking tomahawks of the savages, who grinned and congratulated each other on the tortures they were inflicting on the American boys.

The youths were playing and dancing for dear life. Whenever one relinquished the accursed crank for a moment, to catch his breath, the leader of the band, a gaunt savage, would start forward with drawn tomahawk, and eyes glaring with the most brutal of murders. The other was not allowed to pause in his forced dance, and more than once the Indian above-mentioned had thrown new but transitory life into his tired limbs.

"They will have to tomahawk me ere long," at last groaned the youth at the organ. "Nature is almost exhausted; my arm feels like a bar of lead, and my blood is on fire. Oh! heaven, why did I allow my adventurous spirit to lead me into the jaws of death? The sweetest of all homes had I, the best of fathers, sisters—and a mother—in heaven! Yes, mother! mother! I have journeyed here to meet thee.



I can hold out no longer — there! God help me now!"

With the last words he pushed the instrument from him, and staggered back with a groan of despair.

The Indians leaped to their feet, and, with a wild yell, the gaunt taskmaster bounded forward with upraised tomahawk.

The youth could not resist; he sunk to the ground and looked calmly at his would-be slayer. But a form threw itself between him and the Indian. It was the form of his young companion.

"Charley, we'll die together," said the youngest boy, through compressed lips. "They shan't kill you, and leave me. I persuaded you to undertake this death-journey—"

"No, no, George. The blame is mine! Heaven! the fiend is upon us."

The boys saw the fiendish face and gory tomahawk of the Pawnee above them, and George threw himself upon the prostrate body of his friend.

The savage shot an expressive "ugh" from his lips, and stooped to tear the twain apart, for it was evident that one was to be spared, when the sharp crack of a rifle rung out on the cool night air, and the Pawnee staggered from his victims with a death-cry.

The shot started the Indians into fiery life, and, quickly following the report, a wild yell saluted their ears.

"Scatter 'em, Tecumseh!" cried the hoarse voice of a man. "We'll give the Pawnee dogs thunder to-night. Cl'ar the way, ye red devils! I'm right among ye—Frontier Shack!—and ye've see'd me afore."

Down the hill, like a dusky thunderbolt, came the speaker. He stood erect in the stirrups, a revolver in either hand, the reins lying across Tecumseh's neck. He looked like a demon of destruction in the light of the fire, and he added new and terrible life to the scene on the banks of the Platte.

"Trample the dogs down, horse!" he yelled, and as he reached the foot of the hill, bang, bang, bang, went the chambers of his deadly weapons.

Not a bullet was thrown away; with each report an Indian fell backward, and before the white, death-dealing



whirlwind they scattered and fled, every man for himself, toward the river.

The horse was in his glory; he overtook several of the red fugitives, and knocked two beneath his iron-shod feet, never to rise again.

Bang! bang! and two more dropped dead at the water's edge; another shot, the last, and the Nebraska was crimsoned with the blood of a third.

"We've roasted 'em, Tecumseh," said the hunter, as the steed paused in the water to slake his burning thirst. "They can't stand afore ye, horse, they can't do it, by Joshua! Now we'll go back and look for the boys."

A moment later Frontier Shack was galloping back to the fire.

He found Charley Shafer on his knees, supported by his stronger friend, George Long.

Frontier Shack dismounted and knelt before the twain.

"As weak as kittens, almost," he said, in a kindly tone; "and dash me, if I didn't reach these diggin's in the nick o' time. Them devils might hev' known that ye couldn't play and dance forever; but ye'll live to pay 'em back!"

"I hope so, sir," said George, his eyes lighting up with vengeance. "Don't you want to pay the dogs back, Charley?"

"Yes," was the feeble answer. "Every dog has his day, George."

"How came ye hare?" suddenly broke in the frontiersman. "Ye came out with a train, I suppose."

"Yes; we were attacked this day about noon. It was a terrible massacre."

"Who led the Pawnees?—for Pawnees, of course, the red dogs were."

"A white man—the 'Dandy Demon of the Plains,' I should call him."

Frontier Shack gritted his teeth.

"We'll talk about that scoundrel—Tom Kyle—some other time," he said. "How many escaped the butchery?"

"Three persons, besides ourselves. They were Mr. Denison, Government agent, his daughter Mabel, and his niece, Miss Aiken. After the massacre the band divided; the



larger portion went northward with the three; we fell to the lot of the minority."

"Where did that organ come from?"

"An Italian was crossing the plains with the emigrants, to try his fortune in the land of gold."

"And he's found it afore he got there," said the hunter, with a strange smile. "He'd hev' done better on Broadway, I think. But, my boys, ye weren't emigrants; yer clothes—"

He paused suddenly, ashamed to proceed.

"No, we were not emigrants," answered George Long, glancing at his companion with a smile, which was followed by a mortifying blush.

"We are runaways; our parents live in Cincinnati, Ohio, and are well to do in the world."

"Then, why did you leave home and seek this death-land?" asked Shackelford, the stern part of his nature getting uppermost.

"I will tell you the truth," said George, looking him squarely in the eyes. "We came hither to shoot white buffaloes."

For a moment the old hunter stared blankly into the youthful faces before him, then he rose to his feet and gave a long whistle of profound wonder and astonishment.

The boys watched him anxiously.

For several minutes he look vacantly toward the south, and then a ludicrous smile overspread his countenance.

"Who told you about white buffaloes?" he asked, stooping again.

"No one, sir. We read about them in Gregg's *Commerce of the Prairies*."

"And you believed it?"

"Why—yes!"

Another long whistle which ended in a laugh.

"I've heard of wild-goose chases afore," said the hunter: "but this beats all of 'em. White buffler! Thet Gregg's ahead o' me, and I've seen the plains and prairies from the Platte to the Santa Fe. And I've seen buffler, too, boys; but nary a white one. We've got white horses, white foxes, and the like out here;" but, a short pause, "Gregg *may* be right. I don't call any man a liar till he is proven one."



The young hunters took courage at this last remark.

"I wish you boys war at home in Ohio," said the frontiersman; "but ye're here, and I'm goin' to take care of ye. We'll strike Fort Laramie one o' these days, and then home ye go! But, we're in the jaws of death yet, and mebbe two more Ohio scalps and one Maryland one, may hang at the Loup's belt afore the week's out. We'll go now; Tecumseh can carry three, I reckon."

"But hold," cried Charley Shafer. "What will become of those girls—they're in a demon's clutches."

"Yer right, boy," said the scout of the Platte; "but I guess we'll let 'em be."

"No, no!" cried both boys in a single breath. "They shall not be his."

Frontier Shack smiled:

"Boys, yer the true grit!" he cried, "jest the chaps to hunt white bufflers. The girls shan't be Tom Kyle's long. He can muster three thousand red wolves. We'll face him—the terror of the Plains—and we'll free his prisoners, or—"

"Die in the attempt!"

The old hunter caught the spirit that animated the breasts of the youths.

"Yes! yes! I'm growin' tired of this life," he said, "and I might as well die fighting the White Pawnee as trappin' beaver."

The next moment he spoke to Tecumseh, and, despite the load he carried, the noble horse dashed away like an antelope.

"I'll crease two splendid horses for ye, boys," he said, "and then, for Tom Kyle's pris'ners and—white bufflers!"

The last words were clothed in irony, and they set the two boys to thinking anxiously.

They had chased an *ignis fatuus* over twelve hundred miles of territory—to die, perhaps, at the Pawnee stake.



## CHAPTER II.

## THE GOLD GIRL.

WHILE the thrilling scenes recorded above were transpiring on the banks of the Platte, the fate of two beautiful girls was being decided not many miles away.

To this scene we turn, for it is time that one of the most prominent actors in our wild western drama should appear in the mad, relentless role he has to play.

The somber shades of evening were prevailing when two score and six horsemen entered the great village of the Pawnee Loups, situated on the head-waters of the Loup fork of Platte. The hardy mustangs gave forth evidences of fatigue, their flanks reeked with sweat, and several seemed on the eve of dropping to the earth from utter exhaustion.

The mustangs' riders, with four exceptions, were Indians, great stalwart fellows, naked to the waist, and painted for the murderous foray.

Their leader—let me describe their leader.

He was a white man, whose tanned countenance denoted a roving, restless life. His face was faultless to the minutest particular; his eyes were dark and piercing, like the eagle's, and an ocean of long raven locks fell over his rich crimson serape. His head was crowned by a black sombrero, whose snow-white plume swept his silken hair, while his waist was encircled by a crimson scarf, worked with mythological designs in gold thread. His fingers, as white and delicately shaped as a woman's, glittered with gems, set in hoops of gold—jewels, which were, no doubt, the fruits of a raid upon some rich New Mexican hacienda. The ornamented butts of two revolvers showed themselves above the scarf, and at his side hung a short Spanish sword, whose metallic scabbard, carved with quaint designs, among them the Departure of Boabdil, proclaimed it a relic of early Spanish days.

To complete the fantastic costume of the Pawnees' king



"Spanish spurs, with bells of steel,  
Dashed and jingled at his heel!"

He possessed the air and bearing of one born to command; he could have brought subordination from the most mutinous of Cossack bands, with the flashings of his eyes; he was, to sum up all in a nutshell, "half angel and half Lucifer."

Such a man, reader, once held the mighty Pawnee nation under his thumb; they could go and come but at his bidding, he could inaugurate a massacre with a word, and save a captive with the same. He was still young, and an American, bred and born.

He seemed proud of his authority as he galloped at the head of his braves into the Indian village, and when he drew rein in the square, if "square" the plot of ground that held the council-house can be called, he raised his symmetrical body in the stirrups, and flashed his eyes over the concourse of noisy people below.

"Conduct the pale-faces to Kenoagla's lodge!" he cried, suddenly turning to his followers who sat immobile on the backs of their exhausted steeds. "The River Wolf and his braves will guard them till I come."

At these commands five Indians left their places, and three steeds were led from the band.

To one of these horses a handsome middle-aged white man was bound, while the other blankets, for the only saddle belonging to the marauders crowned the Pale Pawnee's "buck-skin," were occupied by two young girls, whose pale, fearful, fearful faces were exceedingly beautiful, and whose garments indicated wealth, but now, how strangely out of place!

"I demand, sir, our release for the last time," said the gentleman, looking into the dandy demon's face, as he was led past by a Pawnee. "The Government will not brook such an insult to one of her agents."

A contemptuous smile curved the white king's lips, and that smile grew broader when he glanced at the girls, just before his mustache-crowned lips parted in speech.

"*I am a king sir!*" he answered, proudly flashing the light of his dark eyes upon the captive gentleman. "A free king,



sir, at that. I rule this country, as far as your eyes can reach, when the sun has reached the meridian. You see my capital, my subjects, my thunderbolts. Here, in my stronghold, or out on the plains, at the head of my red-boys, I defy the Government that sent you hither. I am an American! I am proud of the name; but I am a king, also. Lead on, Wolf. I will talk to Uncle Sam's agent at some future time."

"As sure as my name's Frank Denison, you shall rue this indignity," hissed the agent, through clenched teeth. "My Government will not submit to the hellish deeds of an Apache, the brutality—"

"Father, do not imitate the fiend!" interrupted the silvery voice of Mabel Denison. "Fiery words may send the bullet to your brain. We can curse in secret, and it will avail as much as anathemas poured upon his head in thunder tones."

Frank Denison became silent; but he grated his teeth, and bit his pale lips as he moved on from the renegade's sight.

Kenoagla did not catch all the young girl's words; but the appellation bestowed upon him, in her first sentence, fell indistinctly upon his ears, and he flashed a fearful scowl upon her.

"My young lady, you'll rue that, some of these fine days," he murmured. "You are completely in *my* power, and all the gold in the United States Treasury could not ransom you therefrom. And your father—if he gets an opportunity to tell the Government about Tom Kyle, then I'll give my clothes to Red Eagle, and transform myself into a squaw!"

His white teeth met behind the last word, and the next moment he turned to a young chief that sat near.

"Ready, Red Eagle?"

The Pawnee nodded.

Then the renegade faced his band, and the next moment every steed was riderless.

He, however, retained his perch, and made up to Red Eagle, who was standing on the ground beside his white mustang.

"Up."

Red Eagle vaulted nimbly to his old perch.

"Follow!"

The renegade touched the flanks of his "buck-skin" with



the heavy silver spurs, and through the Pawnee village the twain galloped, toward the river.

Not a word was spoken by either until they drew rein on the bank of the western stream. Then the Pale Pawnee spoke a single word, and they leaped to the ground.

The night had fairly thrown her veil about the face of nature now, and the clear water glittered beautifully beneath the stars, as it pushed its way, with more than one sweet murmur, to the broad bosom of the Platte.

"Now we will settle about the captives," said the renegade, as they threw themselves upon the rich grass that thrived to the very edge of the water. "I speak truly, chief, when I say that I don't care which falls to my lot. If you have a preference, speak it, and you shall have my hand on my satisfaction."

"The pale flowers are beautiful," answered the Indian, quickly, and with a dash of admiration. "The eyes of one are as blue as the Manitou's carpet, and her hair shines like the stones which the pale-faces seek for toward the setting sun. Her sister's eyes are like the night; her hair as black as the crow's wing. Red Eagle could live with either; but he and the Pale Pawnee will play for them."

"I am satisfied. Go, get your sticks, chief, and let me guess as soon as possible."

His tones proclaimed much impatience, and he watched the Indian move up the stream in the demi-gloom.

"Playing guess for a wife!" he ejaculated with a smile, when Red Eagle had passed beyond hearing distance. "I've got to humor that accursed red-skin, too. He's becoming uncommon popular—too popular for me! I have more foes in this village than I ever had, and I find it pretty difficult to rule them. If that chap was out of my way! He's doing all the mischief, and doing it so infernal slyly, too. He's the best dissimulator this side the Rockies, and I can't circumvent him. I know I stand over the crater of a volcano, and the fire that burns under my feet is his heart—his accursed scheming heart."

"Who Pale Pawnee talking to?"

Tom Kyle started, and almost sprung to his feet.

The chief stood before him, his left hand gently clerched.



"Red Eagle could find no sticks," he said, smiling at the renegade's surprise. "But he has found a black stone and a yellow one. The black stone is the flower with midnight hair; the yellow stone is her sister."

Then Red Eagle suddenly whirled and dexterously changed the pebbles, while his face was turned from his white companion.

"Now!" he cried, facing Kyle again. "Each of Eagle's hands holds a stone. Let the Pale Pawnee touch on. If he touches the hand that holds the yellow stone, the fairest skinned is his, the black-haired one Red Eagle's."

The great red hands were outstretched toward the renegade, side by side, and the guesser stood before them, a statue of indecision.

He had a preference—his face told his red companion that—and he did not want to guess the girl he desired into Red Eagle's hands. He inspected the fists a long time before he raised his hand, and then he held his finger over the chief's right member, unwilling to see it descend.

All at once he threw a slight glance upward through his long black lashes.

The Indian's eyes were riveted upon his finger, and a strange smile, which the renegade deemed one of triumph, toyed with his handsome lips.

"I'll catch him!" mentally ejaculated the renegade, dropping his eyes to his hand again. "I'll cheat him out of the blonde, yet."

The next moment his finger took a great leap, and alighted on Red Eagle's *left* hand.

The Indian laughed triumphantly, and opened his hand.

The black stone glittered in the red palm.

The Pale Pawnee could not repress a cry of rage and disappointment.

"Kenoagla wanted the Gold Girl," said Red Eagle, calmly; "but she has fallen to the lot of the Pawnee. She shall build his fires and warm his couch when the snow comes."

Tom Kyle bit his nether lip till the blood dyed his chin.

"Would not Red Eagle have been content with the dark flower?"



"Yes."

"I will give him the dark flower, then, for the gold one."

The Indian drew back.

"No, no!"

"I'll throw this serape into the bargain. You have coveted it for five years."

"Red Eagle won't sell the Gold Girl."

"Not for the darker flower, my serape and sword?"

"No!"

"Then he shall keep her! The Pale Pawnee will love his captive, and he hopes that the gold flower will thrive in Red Eagle's lodge."

With the last word, he put forth his hand, and in the soft starlight the palms of red and white met.

It was the grip of a Cæsar and his Brutus—the silent pledge, beneath friendship's cloak, of hatred and treason bitter and intense.

"The fate of the pale flower is settled now—settled forever, chief. One is mine, the other yours. I'll settle the insulting agent's doom hereafter."

A few moments later the arbiters of others' fates remounted their steeds and rode toward the Pawnee lodges.

They did not cast their eyes behind as they galloped from the river, therefore they did not see the figure which suddenly appeared on the scene, and stood between them and the silver of the starlit waves.

"The Gold Girl is his," said a woman's voice, stern with terrible sarcasm and determination. "Winnesaw thought she was his. But who is this Gold Girl? Where did she come from, and where is her father's lodge? Ha! Kenoagla has returned from the war-path; his hand has struck the pale-faces who travel along the big river to the land of yellow stones. He found two girls there—dark and gold. They played for them here to-night. Kenoagla wanted the Gold Girl, but he got the dark one. But he shall have the Gold Girl—at least Red Eagle shall never see her asleep, like the fawn, on his couch. Winnesaw is Red Eagle's—the Gold Girl is not."

The slender and beautiful Pawnee girl grew into a very



Pythoress as, with clenched hands and gritted teeth, she stood on the spot which the secret enemies had just vacated.

Several moments of silence followed her last word, when she suddenly tore herself from the river-bank, and darted toward the village, hidden by the darkness.

"The Gold Girl—the Gold Girl!" she repeated, in an audible tone, as she bounded over the ground. "Winnesaw is going to see the Gold Girl, whom Red Eagle won to-night."

Poor, unloved Winnesaw!

She never dreamed what would follow her meeting with Lina Aiken, the "Gold Girl."

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE VENGEANCE-HUNTER.

THE occupants of the Pale Pawnee's lodge awaited, with fear, anxiety and impatience, his return. They had witnessed his departure with Red Eagle, and they felt that something terrible was about to transpire.

Mr. Denison now knew that the renegade defied the American Government, and he believed that it was Kenoagla's intention to make short work of him. He had heard of the cruelties of the Pawnees; their treatment of the emigrant trains had reached the ears of the authorities at Washington, and measures were being adopted to chastise the red marauders and protect the trains. But the Government was snail-like in its operations; and while it hesitated, while other measures not so important as the lives of our emigrants retarded the humane step, the Pawnee tomahawk was reeking with blood on the banks of the Platte.

The Indians would submit when the iron hand of the Great Father at Washington closed on them; but they would massacre so long as the blue-coats kept out of sight. Train after train was halted by the savage whoop; and the poor emigrants were suddenly called upon to sell their scalps at the price of blood. Seldom mercy was shown, but now and then some



ovely girl was spared and carried to a dreadful captivity, in the lair of the Pawnee or the giant Sioux.

The train in which Mr. Denison and the dear ones under his charge had taken passage, was attacked near the banks of the Platte, ten miles below the mouth of the Loup Fork. The force that bore down upon the caravan was overwhelming—it could not be resisted. The train was feeble in point of numbers—too feeble, in fact, to cross the plains; but the men fought bravely for themselves and families. But their bravery availed them naught, for the Indians were armed with Government rifles and revolvers, which they could handle with deadly effect.

Finally the defenders surrendered. Kenoagla—Tom Kyle—had promised quarter, but he broke his word. He did not attempt to restrain his red fiends; but he saved the lives of the Government agent and his charges, while an inferior chief belonging to a Pawnee village situated many miles toward the head of the Platte, succeeded in rescuing the brace of white buffalo-hunters from the vengeance of the tomahawk.

After the massacre the bands separated.

“Father, some dark work is brewing. The white Ogre of these beautiful plains and his red ally are plotting mischief somewhere beneath the stars. I fear your words have irritated him to a fearful degree. I heard him grit his teeth when I rode by. I do not fear for myself—no, no; but for you, father, for you!”

It was Mabel Denison who spoke, and in the darkness that reigned throughout Tom Kyle’s lodge, the fearful girl crept nearer her parent, and threw her arms about his neck.

“I have not thought once of myself, Mabel,” he answered, searching for the pale cheeks, which his lips found, as he spoke her name. “I have been thinking about you and Lina, there. He has saved you for a purpose—he and his red ally.”

“But he shall not carry out his purpose!” returned Mabel, fiercely. “I am not to be this Ogre’s wife; sooner than bear such relation to him I would fly, if I could, to the brazen doors of perdition and knock for admission there!”

“My fair lady will need wings ere long, then.”

The trio turned at the sound of the voice, and saw a dark form between them and the stars.”



Though the face of their visitor could not be seen, the great feather that fell gracefully over his head, and the glitter of silver ornaments on the shoulders of his serape, told them who he was. He had parted the skins without noise, and no doubt had listened to much of the conversation which had lately passed between his prisoners.

Mabel Denison uttered a light cry as she beheld the renegade; but her father gritted his teeth in silence.

"I say you'll need wings ere long, Miss Denison, if you intend carrying out your resolve," continued Tom Kyle, and a light chuckle followed his last word. "Your father spoke truly when he said that I spared you girls for a purpose. And I will inform him just now that he, too, has been spared for a purpose, differing widely from the one for which his child has been spared."

He paused as if expecting Mr. Denison to speak; but, as no word fell from the agent's lips, he continued:

"Ladies, I must separate you."

"No! no!" and Mabel threw herself upon her golden-haired cousin. "If we are to remain your captives, let us, at least, enjoy, if we can, our captivity together. Do not tear us apart; if you still retain a spark of respect for womanly affection, you will change your resolution."

"I am not the sole arbiter of your fates," the renegade replied. "I have been compelled to divide the spoils of our last excursion. Mabel Denison, you are mine; your cousin belongs to Red Eagle."

A trembling cry parted Lina Aiken's lips, and she sunk senseless into Mabel's lap.

"Sir, you are blighting the purest, the sweetest of lives!" cried the agent's daughter, forgetting the passions of the man who confronted her. "Sir renegade, let me tell you, now, that I am not yours. I loathe you, as I loathe the scaly folds of the serpent, and—"

"Girl," and the word sounded like ice-drops falling on red-hot iron, "I beg of you to desist. I am passionate—a word makes me a devil!"

"No, no! you have ever been such."

The Spanish sword leaped from the gilded scabbard, and Tom Kyle sprung forward with an oath.



"Girl, curse you! I can find a wife in the next train, or the Gold Girl—"

His vengeful sentence was broken by the entrance of an Indian, and the renegade found himself hurled to the furthest part of the lodge.

"Kenoagla would kill Gold Girl!" cried the new-comer, snatching Lina Aiken from Mabel's embrace. "Gold Girl belong to Red Eagle. Kenoagla die if he touches her!"

"Leave me Lina, Red Eagle," cried Mabel, springing to her feet, to be met by the broad palm of the Pawnee chief.

"No, no, Gold Girl Red Eagle's; dark girl Kenoagla's. The sisters meet often in Pawnee lodges. Gold Girl must go to chief's wigwam; she still sleeps."

With a painful groan Mabel Denison sunk back and dropped into her father's arms.

At this juncture the renegade regained his feet, and came forward, gritting his teeth with rage.

"Who, in the name of the furies—"

He paused suddenly when he found himself face to face with Red Eagle.

"Kenoagla let the storm rise in his heart. He sought Gold Girl's blood; but Red Eagle came, and he pushed Kenoagla."

"I didn't seek the Gold Girl; the dark one made me mad."

"Then Red Eagle did wrong!"

"No, no, chief. I am glad you pushed me. I wouldn't kill that girl for the world now. All the venom she can fling can irritate me no more. But I'm going to show her, in more senses than one, that she is mine! mine! mine!"

He bent forward as he hissed the last words, and Mabel Denison felt his hot breath scorch her pale cheek.

"Red Eagle, and his Gold Girl go now," said the Pawnee, breaking the silence that followed.

"Yes, go."

The next instant the Indian turned on his heel, and hurried away with the unconscious Gold Girl in his arms.

"I'm not going to disturb you with my presence longer to-night," said Tom Kyle, addressing his captives. "But I would bid you, before I go, to prepare for another separation. Mr. Denison, you leave the Pawnee village to-morrow."

The agent and his child were silent.



"Did you ever read the story of Mazeppa?" the renegade asked, after a long silence.

A low "My God, Mabel," told the villain that that famous ride was not unknown to his captive.

"So you have heard of that ride," chuckled Tom Kyle. "Well, Mr. Denison, to be brief, we're going to make a Mazeppa out of you to-morrow. I'll have some of my fellows to lasso or crease a wild horse, and perhaps the beast may bear you to Washington, where you can lay your wrongs before the Government. So prepare for the ordeal, I say."

He stood a moment longer in the doorway, then turned abruptly on his heel, with a fiendish laugh, and walked away.

"I'm going to see what Red Eagle is doing with the Gold Girl," he murmured, walking toward the chief's lodge. "By heavens! she shall not belong to him. I had marked her for my own long before the train surrendered, and Tom Kyle can't be balked by a red-skin. Let me get her in my clutches once, and a buck-skin shall bear me to the Apaches. I've been among them; they are ready to follow my white plume. What a beautiful white queen the Gold Girl would make! Red Eagle, she shan't be yours long. I mean it, I swear it!"

A certain light now attracted the renegade's attention, and his voice ceased altogether. He walked more cautiously than ever, and at last knelt behind a wigwam, the build and decorations of which proclaimed it the habitation of a chief.

He lay like a corpse on the ground, and his eyes, flashing like fire, almost touched a crack, through which he was drinking in the scenes that were transpiring in the lodge.

Red Eagle bent over Lina Aiken, who lay upon a couch of skins, pale and motionless.

The red-man was watching her intently.

"Gold Girl sleep long," the Indian murmured, and a look of fear sat enthroned upon his anxious face. "The Pale Pawnee's words chased her near the dark river. He wants Gold Girl; he tried to cheat Red Eagle to-night, but she shall never warm his couch. The Indians hate him; they would give Red Eagle his plume, his serape, his sword; but Red Eagle say, 'not yet.' But," and a dark scowl overrode the fearful expression, "let the Pale Pawnee touch Gold Girl and he get this—this."



Significantly, as if addressing some one, the chief touched the hilt of his knife, and the silvered butt of "Colt," then clenched his hands and gritted his teeth till they cracked.

The passions that bubbled and hissed in the spectator's heart cannot be described, and once he drew his revolver and cocked it, and put it up again.

"Curse you, Indian!" he hissed. "Its diamond cut diamond now; you won't live ten days, I swear it, by my hopes of eternal life! and the Pawnees shall be kingless before the expiration of that time."

For several moments longer Red Eagle watched over his beautiful captive, whose insensibility had created some alarm in the breast of his arch-enemy, lying at the base of the wigwam, watching and biding his time for revenge and success.

"Red Eagle go bring Medicine," suddenly cried the chief, starting to his feet. "Gold Girl sleeps too long. Red Eagle can't wake her; Medicine can."

Then the Indian, after casting a long look upon the marble form on the couch, walked from the lodge, and Tom Kyle heard him bounding away toward the Pawnee doctor's wigwam with the fleetness of the deer.

"Now I could rob him of his Gold Girl, and rob him effectually," ejaculated the renegade. "One blow could constitute my revenge; but I would have to fly for my life, and leave my captives here. No, I won't do it. I will bide another time; then, if I can't wed her, I can strike."

Again he turned his eyes to the crack, but started from the wigwam with a low ejaculation of surprise.

The figure of a girl stood over Lina Aiken. It was Winnesaw. The renegade recognized her in a moment, and he almost cried aloud when his gaze dropped from her flashing eyes to the slender-bladed knife that glittered in her right hand.

He saw, too, that the girl had just entered the lodge, and that the beauty of Lina had riveted her, as it were, to the ground.

He gazed upon her, too horror-stricken to dissipate the striking tableau!



Suddenly the Indian girl stooped over her rival; the passionate fire vanished from her dark eyes, like mists from a morning sun, and the light of love and pity supplied its place.

Nearer and nearer the red face approached Lina Aiken, and at last the lips of the strange twain met.

"Poor Gold Girl!" the renegade heard Winnesaw murmur, as she slowly raised her head. "Winnesaw came here to kill; but the Gold Girl is too pretty for her knife."

For an instant she knelt over Lina, admiring her unconscious form; then the knife suddenly flew aloft again.

Tom Kyle, the watcher, started, and held his breath.

He saw the firm set lips of the Pawnee girl, by the light of the fire in the center of the lodge; and he saw the glittering blade descend like a bolt of lightning!

It grazed the Gold Girl's head and severed a shining tress, which rolled from the fox-skin pillow.

Winnesaw's hand darted upon the severed lock, and the next moment it was hidden away in her bosom.

Then the Indian started to her feet, and Lina Aiken was alone again.

Slowly her eyes unclosed, and with a look of bewilderment she rose to a sitting posture and gazed about the apartment.

The sleep of insensibility had been broken, as it were, by the rape of a lock.

The watcher hailed her recovery with an exclamation of joy, and, simultaneously with the return of Red Eagle, accompanied by the Pawnee Medicine, he was brought to his feet by a yell.

"The Platte Pawnees have entered the village!" he exclaimed. "What can it mean?"

He bounded to the council square, and found a crowd of red-skins swarming about several wild-looking men seated on jaded steeds.

In an instant his voice quieted the Bedlamic uproar.

The new-comers sprung erect on the backs of their horses, and in thundering tones told the story of Frontier Shack's victory on the banks of the Platte.



A thousand yells of vengeance followed the narration.

"I must lead them," muttered Tom Kyle. "That infernal trapper has been too fresh of late; he hasn't heeded my summons an accursed bit!"

Then he called for his horse: but a savage had anticipated the command, and the renegade turned to find his steed at his side.

A few moments later two hundred Pawnees sat astride their horses.

At a motion from the renegade they sprung erect, uttered a thrilling war-whoop, and then galloped from the village, shouting like demons, standing like statues on the backs of their steeds.

The Pale Pawnee was ill at ease, and he bit his lips till they bled, as he rode, like a fantastically-dressed circus performer, at the head of his red band.

He felt that his reign was drawing to a close, and he was acting through policy now.

"Curse that Indian!" he suddenly hissed, and, while the words still quivered his lips, he heard his followers divide for the purpose of allowing a horseman to gain the front.

A moment later that horseman joined the renegade.

It was red Eagle.

"Red Eagle help punish the island pale-face, too," said the chief. "We catch and burn, or tie to wild horse, the beaver-catcher and the pale boys.

"Yes, yes, chief," said Tom Kyle, but he added, under his breath, "Mr. Red Eagle, you've seen the Gold Girl for the last time; that is, if I can shoot straight enough to-morrow night, and, for ten years, I haven't missed a mark."



## CHAPTER IV.

## CHARLEY SHAFER'S RIDE.

"DASH me, boys, if we ain't in sight of the old place already," cried Frontier Shack, abruptly terminating a silence which had lasted for many minutes, during which time Tecumseh had borne his riders rapidly from the scene of the trapper's victory. "Things look remarkably quiet about the shanty, and I guess we'll find everything in apple-pie order—just as I left 'em yesterday."

The horse knew that he was near the trapper's home, for he gave a shrill, joyous neigh, and sprung forward with new zeal.

Daylight now flooded the plains once more, every vestige of darkness had disappeared, and the scene that stretched before the young hunters' vision filled their souls with rapture, and caused them to forget that they were riding over dangerous ground—that this fair land was still inhabited by the fierce aborigine of America.

They were on rising ground, and the beautiful valley of the Platte lay at their very feet. The water shone like silver in the strong light that preceded the rising of the sun, and the islands that dotted the stream—the cotton-wooded islands—resembled rich gems in a magnificent setting. Far beyond the stream a black mass, imbued with life, moved westward, like some giant cloud creeping along the horizon's bar.

That living blackness was a herd of buffalo. The young hunters had encountered the emperors of the plains before, but not in such numbers; and they could not repress an exclamation of wonderment when they gazed upon the mighty bisonic legion.

"Yes, them's buffler," said Shackelford, "and they're all brown fellars, too."

The boys exchanged looks and curious smiles.

"So you think there are no white ones in that herd?"



"The frontiersman laughed.

"Nary a white one," he said; "but look yonder—up-stream I mean. D'ye see thet conical island?"

"Yes."

"Well, I live there."

"I see no house."

"Ye'll see it d'rectly. The cottonwoods hide it now."

"How long have you dwelt yonder?"

"Nigh onto six years. I was with the 'Paches awhile, but we hed a slight difficulty, so I came north, and squatted on Pawnee territory. Tecumseh and I hev enjoyed life splendidly here."

"Unmolested by the Indians?"

"Well—no. If it hedn't been fur thet Tom Kyle, I'd hev been scalped long ago. The red greasers caught me when I first squatted here; but thet white devil happened to hev a streak of mercy on then, and he made 'em let me go. Then he gave me liberty to trap on the Loup, and its branches, so long as I behaved myself. But I haven't done thet of late. Tecumseh and Shack have helped more'n one emigrant out of a scrape, and I've been looking for Tom Kyle every day for two months. It's human natur' to help a suffering fellar human; and I've killed nigh onto as many Pawnees as beaver within the last thirty days. But the safety jig is up now, I feel it in my bones. Tom Kyle won't keep off much longer, and he is a reg'lar thunderbolt, he is, by Joshua!"

By this time the river had been reached, and a small hut was visible on the island, that lay in the center of the glittering water.

"Every thing's snug," said the trapper, when a great mastiff bounded from the cottonwoods and waded a short distance into the stream. "If any thing was wrong, ye wouldn't see Massasoit there."

The next moment the steed had plunged into the water, which scarcely touched his flanks, and after a brief spell the trio found themselves on the island.

"This river beats all for quicksands," said Shackelford; "but Tecumseh understands 'em. If he'd hev stopped for one moment the infernal sand would hev caught 'im, and



then good-by, Tecumseh. I shot a prowling Pawnee in this river about four years ago, and the sand took him and his horse down, down, and he never come up again, dash me! if he did."

It was a relief to the white buffalo hunters to find themselves under a roof once more. Everywhere they saw the fruits of the trapper's industry. A large quantity of valuable pelts was stored away in the cabin, and the larder was well stocked with meat, and firearms also abounded.

The hut was divided into two apartments on the ground, and a rough unfinished dormitory lay above. One of these rooms served as Tecumseh's stable on stormy nights, or when horse-stealers infested the neighborhood; and then Frontier Shack lay at the threshold, guarding the noble horse he loved, while Massasoit slept in the hollow trunk of a tree just beyond the cabin door.

The sun scaled the horizon and added a myriad of new beauties to the Platte, while the western trapper and his new-found companions discussed the contents of the cabin's larder, with zest mingled with merriment.

The frontiersman was in the midst of an exciting narration of life in the Apache country, when a sharp bark from Massasoit saluted the trio's ears.

Frontier Shack sprung to his feet and gripped his rifle.

"Wild horses!" he exclaimed, as handing the weapon to Charley Shafer, he jerked the Spanish saddle from its pins, beside the door.

"Boys, select a rifle from the corner, and be quick about it! Mebbe you can get good horses now, and God knows we'll need 'em when we go after the girls."

The next moment the youths were well armed, and Tecumseh stood before the cabin equipped for a battle with his wild brethren.

"They're coming up the river," said the trapper as he drew the boys to a place behind the saddle. "I believe it's the lost band."

"The lost band?"

"Yes; the wild horses don't belong to this latitude," he answered; "but, somehow or other, a gang hev been cavorting around here for several months, and I b'lieve thet



they're actually lost. I've tried to crease a black stallion among 'em, fur several weeks; but they won't let me get within range. Now, p'raps—dash me! I'll get Blackey this time."

A word drove Tecumseh into the water, and amid the thundering of the wild cavalcade, the bank was gained.

"Something is chasing 'em!" said Frontier Shack, listening to the noise of the unshod hoofs which momentarily grew louder. "Mebbe it's Pawnees, and they'll cheat us out of a horse if they can."

The thunder of the curbless steeds seemed to shake the ground beneath Tecumseh's feet, and it was with difficulty that Shackelford could restrain his horse, from rushing forward. With arched neck, flashing eyes, and distended nostrils the iron-gray stood on the river's bank, trembling from head to fetlocks with intense excitement.

Nearer and nearer, though still unseen, came the wild army, and it was evident that they would pass the base of the rise that hid them from the trio's vision.

"Quiet, Tecumseh!" hoarsely commanded Frontier Shack.

"What's got into ye to-day? Ye've heard wild horses afore. I creased ye once, and now, mebbe, yer thinking of old times. Be still! I say! Now they're passing the round hill," he said, addressing the boys, and the next moment, cocking the rifle he carried, the trapper ordered his steed forward.

Tecumseh obeyed with a snort.

The top of the rise was gained, and the magnificent sight at his base burst upon the trio's gaze.

Three hundred wild horses, black, white, iron-gray, and piebald, were sweeping along in the glory of majestic beauty and strength. Uncurbed by bit, and unbled by spurs, each looked like a monarch, as with head erect, and flecked with foam, he rushed westward toward the land of the setting sun.

"There's my horse!" cried the trapper, "there's the black, and on the edge of the band, too. I'll crease him now. Be ready with your rifle, George, for we must have two horses to-day; and when I drop the black, poke the gun over my shoulder."



Frontier Shack had creased more than one wild horse, and for six years he had not fractured a single vertebra.

*Creasing* a wild horse consists in shooting him through the upper crease of the neck, above the cervical vertebrae, when, the ball cutting a principal nerve, he falls as suddenly as if shot in the brain, and remains senseless for a few moments, during which he is secured with a rope. He is easily tamed after this, and the wound heals without leaving any physical injury.

For the first time the "lost band" was passing within rifle-shot of the trapper, and with a countenance flushed with mingled pride and triumph, he raised the rifle.

His eyes were riveted upon the coal-black stallion; he seemed to see, to think of nothing else, and the two youths watched the doomed horse with an interest truly indescribable.

All at once their ears were saluted with a sharp report—they saw the black horse stop, shake like a storm-tossed reed from head to foot, and then drop to the ground!

"Dash me if I hev'n't dropped 'im at last!" cried Shackelford. "No—no! I don't want your rifle, George; the black can carry double well enough. He's as strong as a lion. Tecumseh!"

As the iron-gray shot forward toward the prostrate horse, the trapper unloosed the coil of rope that hung at the saddle-bow, and presently he leaped to the ground beside his victim.

"Now, Blackey!" he cried, in tones of triumph, but the next moment a wild cry of horror followed.

He had scarcely touched the ground when Tecumseh, finding himself masterless, reared on his haunches, then bounded forward with an unearthly snort.

George Long dropped from his perch and fell at the trapper's feet, while Charley Shafer clung to the reins with the grim tenacity of despair.

The "lost band" was yet in sight, and Tecumseh seemed to fly toward them on the pinions of the wind.

He tried to unhorse his young rider; but the youth gripped the gray mane with his teeth and incircled the strong neck with his arms. His hat and rifle had fallen to the ground at the outset of his wild ride, and the horror-stricken



spectators knew that he did not possess a single weapon—not even a knife.

Tecumseh was beyond rifle-shot before the trapper recovered from his fright, and George Long covered his face with his hands to hide his young comrade's doom from his sight!

"Curse that horse!" grated Frontier Shack, breaking the unearthly silence. "He never had the devil in him afore like he hes to-day. Them horses made 'im think what he was once, and now he's gone back to his old life."

"And Charley—poor Charley—is riding to his death."

Frontier Shack shook his head dolefully, as he gazed at the horse and his despairing rider, now a dark speck in the distance.

"I wouldn't give that for the boy's chances," and he snapped his fingers at his side. "If Tecumseh catches the lost horses, may God help Charley then. God help him, anyhow!"

George Long repeated the prayer away down among the deepest and holiest shrines of his terror-frozen heart.

The next moment the runaway and his victim disappeared!

A snort from the black steed startled the couple, and with ready rope the trapper sprung forward. But, before he could secure his dearly-won prize, George Long touched his arm, and uttered a wild shriek.

"My God! Indians!"

In an instant Frontier Shack was on his feet.

His hurried look north-eastward showed him a line of dark forms between him and the horizon.

"Pawnees, by Joshua!"

The savages were distinctly visible, and the rider of the foremost horse could be easily recognized from the spot where the couple stood.

"Tom Kyle wants me," said the Westerner, gritting his teeth. "The upper Pawnees hev told 'im about the fracas last night. We're in for it now, and blood hes got to flow!"

He snatched the rifle which had fallen from the ill-fated boy's hands, and then sprung to the black horse.



"They shan't have Blackey!" he ejaculated, striking the animal's rump with his open hand, and the next moment the horse was flying over the plains, free once more, but marked for life.

"Now for the river, boy!"

A wild yell broke from the Pawnees' throats, as our friends sprung toward the stream, and the red-skins were seen urging their horses into a faster gait.

But they could not overtake the trapper and his protege, and at the brink of the river they halted, afraid to trust their jaded steeds to the mercies of the engulfing sands.

"Poor Tecumseh!" sighed Frontier Shack, as he closed the cabin door and barricaded it firmly. "I feel like one who has lost his best friend. That horse was the only true friend Ote Shackelford ever had, and if he gits out o' this scrape, he's going to hunt Tecumseh till he finds him, dead or alive!"

George Long saw the trapper's lips meet with terrible determination behind the last word, and his mind was called from the contemplation of Charley Shafer's fate by the report of a score of rifles and the thud of bullets, as they buried themselves in the cottonwood logs.

"Fort Shackelford is attacked," said the trapper, with a grim smile, "and the odds are somewhat enormous—two hundred against two."

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## CHAPTER V.

### RIFLE, FIRE AND LASSO.

SEVERAL minutes of silence followed the thud of the Pawnee bullets.

Then the voice of a white man came from the brink of the stream.

"Shackelford!"

The trapper glanced knowingly at George Long, and ascended to the uncouth dormitory. In the gable that looked



toward the besiegers a small window was situated, and to this the frontiersman applied his face.

"Well, what do you want, Kyle?"

"Reports which reached my ears say that you slew eight Pawnees last night. Is it true?"

"I suppose it is," was the reply, "though I counted but seven."

"I fear that your deeds have sealed your doom."

"You don't fear any such thing, Tom Kyle."

The renegade bit his lip, and said a few words to Red Eagle, who sat on his horse near by.

"Shackelford, our errand here can not be a mystery to you," he said, turning toward the cabin again.

"It is not, Tom."

"The odds are against you!"

"Decidedly so."

"Then you had best surrender without further bloodshed."

"What are your terms?"

"I have left all to the Indians; but I will do all I can for you."

"We won't surrender."

"Consider, man."

"We won't surrender."

"Shackelford—"

"*We won't surrender!* we'll fight you and your cutthroats, Tom Kyle, so help me God!"

Then the renegade consigned the inmates of the cabin to the depths of perdition, and turned to his followers again.

The trapper remained for a few moments at the gable loop-hole, and then ducked his head and disappeared.

"Did you hear everything, George?" he asked, as he struck the ground before the youth.

"Yes."

"Do you want to surrender?"

"No!"

The young lips closed emphatically behind the monosyllable, and additional emphasis flashed from the young speaker's dark eyes.



"You're a man, by Joshua!" exclaimed Frontier Shack, grasping the boy's hand. "We'll fight the hounds to-day, and when night comes we'll do suthing else, probably."

After his failure in effecting a surrender, Tom Kyle moved his forces further up-stream, and halted just beyond rifle-shot of the cabin.

He evidently did not care to trust himself within range of Shackelford's rifle, nor was Red Eagle loth to leave the spot where they had first halted.

From his dormitory Shackelford could note the movements of his foes. He saw them lounging about carelessly, or overhauling their ammunition-pouches, and cleaning their weapons. He knew that they were preparing for the darkness, that his island home would then be invested, and stormed by the treacherous two hundred.

"I half expected that the hounds would wait till night," he said, addressing the boy adventurer, who was engaged in cleaning the chambers of a revolver. "Tom Kyle is not going to attempt to reach the island so long as I can cover his heart; but if they get to this grove to-night, they'll hear the biggest noise they ever heard."

The youth looked up, inquiringly.

A minute later the trapper rose and unbarred the door. Opening it boldly, he stepped out, and, in full view of the savages, walked to a giant cottonwood which stood perhaps fifty feet from the cabin.

His movements, which, to say the least, were mysterious, caused the Indians to suspend operations, and watch him.

He walked around the cottonwood several times, not appearing to notice the Indians, then suddenly hastened to the cabin again.

He smiled as he barricaded the door, and George Long could not restrain his curiosity.

"What do such movements mean?" he asked.

"You'll see to-night if they come to the island."

"They will come; I feel certain of that."

"Of course they will."

The day wore wearily on and as the shades of night gathered about the scene, the Pawnee band seemed to gain new life. Ammunition-pouches were carefully inspected, and



adjusted for the last time, and Tom Kyle was seen in the midst of eight or ten sub-chiefs, holding, as it were, a pacific council of war.

When, at last, the council broke up, a young Pawnee, bearing a white fabric on the point of his lance, ran down the river.

Opposite the center of the wooded cove, he hesitated.

"Pale faces give up now?"

"No!"

The undaunted reply caused the brave to whirl on his heel and dart back to his brethren.

Then night, as if eager to witness appalling deeds, suddenly swooped like a black eagle down upon the earth.

"They're swimming the river!" said Frontier Shack, from the loop-hole in the gable. "They were afraid to trust their horses among the sand. Now look out, boy, for they've reached my island."

For the last time Shackelford descended from the gable, and prepared for the attack.

Large numbers of the attacking party had remained on the river banks for the purpose of intercepting the white-faces' escape, should they be so fortunate as to leave the island safely.

The cabin was almost noiselessly surrounded; but the cautious footsteps had been heard by Massasoit, and the faithful animal would follow them around the limits of the hut, with flashing eyes and bristling back.

"I hate this suspense," said George Long, looking up into the trapper's face. "I wish the ball would open."

"They're hatching up something devilish. I know Tom Kyle, and what he can't think of, that Red Eagle can."

At this juncture Massasoit sprung to one corner of the hut with a fierce growl.

"The devils' work has commenced," said Shackelford, calmly. "They're burning us out!"

Without another word he began to ascend to the eaves, with the aid of the rough logs that formed the cabin. George Long watched him by the fire, that cracked in the center of the room.

Presently he heard the report of a pistol, and the sound



of a heavy body falling on brushwood quickly followed.

"One Pawnee won't kindle any more fires," said Frontier Shack, descending. "First blood for Ote Shack. Next!"

A wild yell drowned his last words, and again a volley was poured against the door.

The hunter sprung from the logs and snatched a torch from the fire.

"Dash me if they ain't standing around the tree!" he exclaimed, his eyes lighting up with fierce triumph. "I'll make a scatteration 'mong their ranks now, by Joshua! I will!"

He sprung toward a heavy tinned box which sat in one corner of the apartment, and threw back the lid with his left hand. The next moment he stepped back, thrusting the torch into the box as he executed the movement. A slight noise, like the explosion of a few grains of powder succeeded, and a white smoke rose from the recesses of the box.

But the noise that followed the explosion of the fuse was most terrific. It shook the cabin from gable to foundation and drove our young buffalo-hunter from the crevice by which he was standing. His eyes, too, were blinded by a bright light, and before the noise died away he heard the shrieks of Indians, frightened, wounded, and dying!

"By Joshua! it set the tree on fire!" cried the trapper, gazing at the large cottonwood, now terribly lacerated by the mine which so long had slept in its recesses.

From behind the magnificent trees, the Pawnees were now raining balls upon the cabin, and burning arrows were hissing toward the dry roof.

The destruction must have been fearful, for the burning tree revealed more than a score of forms, mangled and motionless, on the ground, while others, badly injured, were crawling from the spot.

"Listen!"

The dry stuff that formed the roof of the cabin was crackling beneath the blaze of the fiery arrows, and the object of the Pawnees to fire the cabin seemed at last attained.

"They'll burn us out."



"Yes; the old house is bound to go, and we're going, too, presently."

"Going where?"

"To Fort Kearny, mebbe; p'r'aps to the Pawnee village."

"As prisoners?"

"Yes, if we go thar at all, *to-night*."

Then the trapper suddenly walked into the apartment which had served as Tecumseh's stable.

Three minutes later he returned and startled the youth with cocked rifle near the door.

"Did you shoot?"

"No."

"But you heard the report?"

"Yes; it seemed to come from a spot above us."

Frontier Shack lifted his eyes, and placed his index finger on his lip.

Somebody was on the burning roof.

Frontier Shack climbed up the logs, and waited at the aperture between the eave and the uppermost log, for the person on the roof.

Presently he heard the unknown person descending, and sustaining himself with one hand, the trapper cocked a revolver.

But he hesitated; the person might be a friend, for the shot, which had been fired from the roof, had killed an Indian, and who among the Pawnees would attempt such a deed?"

The unknown let himself over the eave hurriedly yet cautiously.

The legs first descended, then came the body, and when the head appeared between the trapper and the stars, a low hiss sounded:

"I hit him between the eyes; the Gold Girl is mine now!"

Frontier Shack raised the pistol, but the head had disappeared before he could scatter the brains he wished to.

"Tom Kyle was on the roof."

"Tom Kyle?" echoed George Long.

"Yes, and he shot an Indian, too."

"What can he mean?"



"A girl's at the bottom of the thing," said Shackelford. "He shot somebody important, for listen at them Indians."

Loud cries, which indicated the death of some Indian of distinction, came from beyond the burning tree, and dark forms could be seen moving wildly in every direction.

"Dash me if he hasn't audacity!" suddenly exclaimed Shackelford, who was watching the savages from a crack near the door. "After killing the Pawnee, Tom Kyle walks right among 'em, no doubt swearing I plugged 'im."

Almost wholly absorbed in the scene before them, the twain continued to look until a burning brand fell at their feet.

"By Joshua! it's getting too hot here, boy. Now for Fort Kearney or Pawneedom."

"I'm ready."

"We must hurry. The Indians won't do much till the chief dies, I calculate; but we must move rapidly."

For a moment the trapper disappeared in Tecumseh's stable, and when he faced the youth again he held a light boat in his arms.

"I hev two boats, but, of course, the dirty dogs found the one at the western point of the island," he said, standing the canoe on end against the logs and clambering to the eaves. "The renegade's bullet has drawn the Indians from behind the cabin, and now is the accepted time."

His strong hands tore the heated roof timbers aside, and almost in less time than I can record the fact, the couple had safely landed themselves with the boat on the island.

George Long breathed freer.

Frontier Shack picked up the canoe and bounded toward the eastern extremity of the cottonwood cone.

They reached it safely, and the boat was launched.

"Silence," admonished the trapper, in the lowest of whispers, and the next minute a noiseless stroke sent the light craft with the speed of a rocket down the quick-sanded river toward Fort Kearney.

The oars were lifted from the clear waves for a second stroke, when a score of rifles sent their leaden contents after the daring fugitives. But the bullets whistled harmlessly past their heads, and George Long uttered an ejaculation of joy.



"We ain't out of the frying-pan yet," whispered the Westerner. "There's a sunken island hyarabouts, and if we strike it, there'll be the deuce to pay."

With the utterance of the final word, Frontier Shack suddenly guided the canoe to the right, and the next second several rifles flashed on the bank.

An oar dropped from the strong hand that gripped it, and the boat was borne around by the rapids.

Suddenly it struck!

"The island, by Joshua!"

George Long sprung to his feet, and the following moment the light craft capsized, hurling him out into the water!

He could not repress a shriek, as he struck the sand, and felt it engulfing his nether limbs, drawing him, slowly yet surely, down to a terrible death!

Frontier Shack had suddenly disappeared, nor was Massasoit to be seen.

The unfortunate boy struggled bravely; but the accursed sand continued to drag him down. He could not extricate himself.

Suddenly he saw two Indians spring to the water's edge. The stars revealed their forms and actions.

He saw the tallest of the twain whirl a rope above his head.

After three circles, the noose suddenly shot from the Pawnee's hand, quivered for a moment in mid-air, and then dropped over the boy's head!

A quick jerk, which almost threw the young Ohioan on his face, tightened the lasso around his body, and he saw the savages gripe the lariat tightly, while a yell of triumph pealed from their throats.

It was now a battle between the Pawnee and the quicksand!



## CHAPTER VI.

## WHITE LASSO'S CAPTURE.

"HEAVEN help me!" broke from Charley Shafer's lips, when he found himself in the perilous situation described in chapter *fourth*.

As Frontier Shack sprung to the ground to attend to the black stallion, Charley immediately assumed the saddle. He feared that Tecumseh's restlessness might result in some wild freak, and he hoped to reach the bridle and curb his ire while his master secured his new prize. But the boy's hand had not disengaged the bridle from the thick mane, when the iron-gray bounded forward.

Young Shafer felt his comrade hurled from his perch, and found himself jerked forward by the bridle which his fingers tightly clutched.

Still, however, he retained his presence of mind, and discovering at once that he could not stop Tecumseh with the bridle, he grappled the long gray hairs of the mane with his hands, and held on for dear life.

Tecumseh was conscious that he had a rider, for he tried to shake the youth off as he bounded over the prairie like a rocket; but he found himself unable to do so.

On, on, still on; the horse actually seemed to gain strength as he proceeded, and, by fearful glances ahead, the young Ohioan saw that he was nearing the lost herd.

"I can't hold out much longer!" he gasped between the clenched teeth, "but I dare not release my hold. In a moment I would be trampled to death by his hoofs, and father would never see his runaway boy again."

Strangely Tecumseh would turn his head whenever a word fell from rider's lips; the horse seemed to think the voice that of his master; but the desire to see his free comrades overruled the obedience he had loved in days gone by, and kept the demon in his eyes.

All at once the boy saw the wild herd execute a sudden



halt, but the next moment they wheeled to the right, and dashed northward as swiftly as before.

The halt enabled Tecumseh to approach very near the lost horses, and, as he "cut corners" at break-neck speed, his rider saw the cause of the horses' sudden change of route.

A long line of dark forms appeared between him and the gray horizon.

They were Indians, scarce a mile away.

How Charley Shafer's heart sprung into his throat at the sight.

If they could but see him!

He released one hand from Tecumseh's mane, waved his handkerchief above his head, wildly and with frantic gestures. But he found that he occupied an insecure seat, and was soon forced to clasp the mane again.

He groaned, as well he might, when he saw that his exertion for salvation had accomplished nothing, for the Indians turned toward the river and he soon lost sight of them.

At last Tecumseh reached his lost brethren. With wild neighs they welcomed him back, and he returned the salute with sundry plunges which almost unhorsed his despairing rider. The horse's strength did not seem weakened in the least degree, and this told Charley Shafer that, in bygone days, he had been the monarch of some great equine family.

For he skirted the edge of the wandering herd like a meteor, and boldly threw himself in the van.

Now the boy clung closer than ever to the iron gray, for eight hundred hoofs were thundering behind him, and the sound fell doomfully upon his ears.

He was riding, helpless, at the head of death.

The sun descended toward the grayish clouds that crowned the horizon, and still over the rolling land the lost herd, and its new leader, thundered on.

The boy at length became so weak and discouraged that it seemed as if he must tumble off the horse's back, and Tecumseh himself seemed to know that his rider would soon drop from his perch.

Suddenly he thought of the Pawnee village, which Frontier Shack said was north of the Platte; and he knew that the horses were running in a northerly direction. Might they



not encounter the Pawnee Loups, and then might a lasso not fall near Tecumseh's head, and he be saved?

He scarcely dared hope for such a finale to his wild ride, and yet he prayed devoutly for it.

The prayers for such a deliverance still rose from his lips, when Tecumseh snorted with rage and sprung to the right.

Almost unhorsed by the unexpected movement, the young white buffalo-hunter raised himself, and uttered an ejaculation of joy commingled with anxious fear.

The lost band, in scaling a prairie hillock, had suddenly come upon a Pawnee village, and a band of Indians!

The latter were near, while far away he saw the former, resting idly by a shining stream, which he felt must be the Loup fork of the Platte.

The Pawnee horsemen, perhaps thirty in number, at once drove their spurs into the rowels of the fresh animals, with a yell which the lost steeds greeted with neighs of astonishment.

Charley saw lassoes made ready as the Pawnees rushed forward, and he saw, too, with infinite joy, that they were gaining on him, at no insignificant rate.

"God help them catch me!" he cried, for captivity was preferable to the doom which had stared him in the face so long.

The singular turn which affairs had taken threw new strength into his limbs; he reached forward, and gripped the bridle which lay on Tecumseh's neck. Then, sitting bolt upright in his saddle, he "see-sawed" on the Mexican bit with all his might.

His action bothered the horses that pressed in his rear, for Tecumseh could not push forward with the alacrity he had known, and the others crowded against him, much to his disquietude.

They tried to pull the brave boy from the saddle; they caught his garments with their teeth, and lacerated his limbs with their frantic exertions.

But, finding that Tecumseh's rider was delaying his progress, they suddenly divided ranks, and, without mercy, left the iron-gray in the rear.

Charley Shafer could have shouted at his victory, but he



was still in the midst of great perils, and he realized his situation.

Still with the strength born of desperation he "see-sawed" on the bit, each moment making the iron-gray more frantic than ever.

He did not look backward for the Pawnees; he feared that a backward glance, like that of Lot's wife, might prove his destruction, and he was bent on conquering the trapper's runaway.

Tecumseh tried to regain his position at the head of the band, but failed, and at last he found himself quite a distance in the rear. Foam now completely covered his fiery body, and he seemed more a white horse than a gray one.

On, on, he pushed with splendid resolution, and so intent was his rider in the work of conquering, that he did not hear the hoofs that crushed the new-born grass in his rear.

But Tecumseh heard the sounds, and put forth every effort of strength.

"What ails the bridle?" suddenly cried the young Ohioan, discovering that the reins had suddenly lengthened. "By my heart! the bit is out of his mouth!"

He spoke truly; his eye had not deceived him.

Now the steed was ungovernable again, and the boy dropping the reins fell forward on Tecumseh's neck, too weak to sit upright.

Where were the Indians now? He turned, but could not see clearly. A dazzling mist floated before his eyes, and the air to him suddenly became dense.

He saw not, felt not, what Tecumseh did—the whirling rope, the sudden tightening of the strong cord, and the throttling that quickly followed.

He felt his hands unclasp, then came the sensation of being hurled through the air—then insensibility!

He opened his eyes amid thirty anxious Pawnee Indians, and his recovery was greeted with yells of delight and triumph.

"White boy ride hunter's horse like young brave," said the giant, who had lassoed Tecumseh, kneeling beside the youth he had rescued. "How he get off with the big steed?"



In a few words our hero acquainted the Pawnees with the circumstances attending his perilous ride, and they admired his pluck in sticking to the animal.

"Pale boy brave enough to be Pawnee," the Indian, who was evidently a chief, continued. "He made White Lasso catch him, by making hunter's horse tired. If gray horse stay at head of band, White Lasso no catch 'im and save boy."

The youth smiled, and thanked the Pawnee for the life he had saved.

He felt that his pluck had gained him a friend among the Indians, and the thought was further strengthened by the Pawnee's words.

"White boy sleep in White Lasso's tent," he said, lifting our weakened hero from the ground.

"Red Eagle got Gold Girl, Pale Pawnee keep the darker rose, and White Lasso make the young rider great chief."

The youth instantly comprehended the Pawnee's words. A division of the captives had already been made, and Mabel Denison had fallen into the hands of the renegade. He allowed a flush of mingled fear and shame to overspread his face, and he clenched his white hands till the nails blued the palms.

Perhaps he already loved the fair girl who had been his companion across the plains, and well might he fear for her safety, if such was the case.

"I will be near her," he murmured, "and perhaps I may yet thank God for my fearful ride through the jaws of death."

The Indians watched the youth and the disappearing horses alternately, until White Lasso strode toward his own steed, panting near by. He bore our hero in his arms, and seated him on the foam-flecked mustang, before vaulting into the Spanish saddle himself.

"White Lasso love white boy," the Indian whispered to his charge. "He had a boy once; but the Apaches scalp 'im 'fore he won his feathers. Pale-face take that boy's place now."

The next moment a middle-aged Indian rode up to the chief.



"Upper Pawnees will want white boy. Kenoagla give him them other day."

White Lasso's face darkened, and fire flashed from his midnight orbs. His hand flew to his knife.

"White boy is White Lasso's son now. Upper Pawnees no git 'im again. The Pale Pawnees can not give 'im back. Kenoagla not Pawnee's true king!"

He shot a glance burdened with passion around upon the band, and the eyes which he met told that Tom Kyle's days of mastery were drawing to a close.

Charley Shafer shot a look of admiration into White Lasso's face; but the next words that fell from the Indian's lips blanched his cheek.

"White Lasso cut boy's heart 'fore he give 'im back to upper Pawnees."

The night closed about the party before they entered the Indian village, and without exciting many of its inhabitants. Charley Shafer reached his captor's tent.

"White boy tired; he sleep now," said the chief, pointing to a couch of buffalo skins, in one corner of the lodge. "Nobody hurt 'im. White Lasso stand 'tween 'im and Upper Pawnees, Red Eagle and Kenoagla."

The boy started.

If those three evils should combine against him, what could White Lasso do? The answer to this interrogative came to him in the echo of the Pawnee's words.

"White Lasso cut boy's heart 'fore he give 'im back to Upper Pawnee."

With a sigh that indicated the prostration of a human frame, the peril-environed Ohio youth threw himself upon the skins and immediately went to sleep.

He dreamed of home in that peaceful slumber—not of his own danger, nor of his young comrade, who, during his sleep, was being engulfed by the treacherous quicksand with a Pawnee lariat around his body.

After watching his captive awhile, White Lasso stole from the lodge, on tip-toe, and walked away.

Scarcely had he disappeared when the skinny curtain slowly parted, and a face was revealed by the fire which lighted up the small apartment.



"How come pale boy here when Kenoagla still far off?" murmured the secret visitant. "Where White Lasso find him? Ha! he pretty as river lily; his skin fairer than Red Eagle's." Then, after a long pause, "Red Eagle not so pretty as pale boy. But Winnesaw go tell Gold Girl that her fair-skinned brother sleeps in White Lasso's lodge."

Then the face disappeared, and the curtains met again.

A new love was born in the Pawnee village that night.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### TREASON.

WINNESAW, the Pawnee girl, could not conjecture how Charley Shafer had fallen into the hands of the thirty braves. She had witnessed the departure of Tom Kyle and his red marauders, the previous night, and the upper Pawnees had informed her that the young pale-faces were with Frontier Shack, and under his strong protecting care.

The return of the renegade was not looked for until some time the coming day, for the savages knew that the trapper would defend his charges to the last extremity, and that the cabin could not be attacked successfully until nightfall. Bent on solving the mystery that enveloped our hero's appearance in the Indian village, Winnesaw did not immediately return to Lina Aiken, the Gold Girl, but proceeded to look up some brave who had composed a part of White Lasso's party.

She saw that individual himself talking in low tones to a young warrior. Both stood in the gloomy shade of a lodge, and all at once Winnesaw grew into a statue not far away.

She felt that she was the subject of the Indian's conversation, and with every sense on the alert she watched the half-naked twain.

"Wolf Eyes will do it all?" she heard White Lasso say in a half interrogative manner.



Wolf Eyes answered, "Yes."

A moment later the Indians parted in the shadows, and Winnesaw glided after the younger, who walked toward the lodge occupied by Mr. Denison and his daughter, Mabel.

She saw him approach the guard with a boldness for which she was not prepared, when she knew that a secret hatred existed between the sub-chief and the renegade, and, parting the curtains, Wolf Eyes stood in a listening attitude a long time.

Some dark project was ripening; the girl felt it no longer now—she knew it."

All at once Wolf Eyes turned from the door, and, in the moonlight that bathed his dark but finely-chiseled face, she saw a smile of triumph, dark, sinister, triumphant, which a Lucifer might covet and be satisfied.

He said a few words in an undertone to the guard, who looked up at the moon, pointed to a wall of black clouds, and nodded his plumed head.

Then Wolf Eyes walked away, dogged by the form of the Indian girl.

She watched him to the door of his lodge, saw him enter, and, approaching as near as she dared in the stillness of the night, she heard the overhauling of revolvers, and the clicking of a rifle-lock.

"What must Winnesaw do now?" she asked herself, with a puzzled expression. "Shall she go back and tell the Gold Girl what she has seen, or shall she watch the traitors?"

Several times she repeated these puzzling questions, and in the end she slowly walked away. A few moments later she passed two Indians, who lay before a large lodge, conversing in low tones, and disappeared beyond the skinny door.

The fire in the center of the apartment was burning low, but it revealed the form of Lina Aiken, stretched upon Red Eagle's couch, fast asleep and dreaming, with a smile on her ripe lips.

For several minutes Winnesaw stood undecided over the sleeping one, and then, stooping, she gently touched Lina's rosy cheek.

The Gold Girl started up with a frightened look.



"Why, Winnesaw, how you frightened me!" she exclaimed, smiling, as she recognized the face above her. "I was dreaming, and you broke my dream in the most bewitching part."

"Winnesaw sorry to wake Gold Girl," said the Pawnee maiden; "but she may dream of spirit-land again when she has told her white sister what she saw to-night."

Lina Aiken instantly became on the alert, and Winnesaw smiled at her eagerness, which drove every vestige of slumber from her eyes.

"What has Winnesaw seen?" she questioned, grasping the girl's arm, and speaking in a tone which caused the Pawnee to shake her head.

"Guards not asleep," she whispered, glancing fearfully at the door. "The Pawnee village is full of red traitors; they seem to outnumber the flowers of the prairies. Winnesaw saw and heard them to-night; they talk low, but are as bold as the Sioux." And then she told Lina Aiken about the conference between White Lasso and Wolf Eyes, and the subsequent actions of the latter.

"What does it all mean?" asked the Gold Girl.

"Cheatery."

"But who is to be cheated?"

"Kenoagla and Red Eagle."

"Explain, Winnesaw; your astounding declarations have confused my poor brain, I can not comprehend you; explain, I say."

"Wolf Eyes loves the Gold Girl's brown sister," the Indian went on, "and White Lasso's heart beats in fire for—for you, my fair-skinned sister."

"What! am I beloved or rather coveted by another red-skin?" groaned the captive blonde, a pallor flitting over her face.

"White Lasso wants Gold Girl," said Winnesaw.

"But, girl, may all this not be a plot of Red Eagle's planning? You know he hates Kenoagla, as your people call the renegade, and may not the two chiefs be in his employ to rob him of Mabel while he is absent?"

Winnesaw shook her head.

"White Lasso and Red Eagle disputed a deer once, and



since that time their lips have been sealed to each other and Wolf Eyes is White Lasso's brother's son."

Lina Aiken did not speak.

"If they waited until the war-party returned, they could not tear the pale-face girls from their captors," continued the Indian girl, after a brief pause.

"Then you think that they intend to carry out their plots to-night?"

"Yes."

"What of my guards?"

"They are the chief's friends; they too are traitors!"

"Then why did Red Eagle place them here?"

"He did not. The Big Medicine put them where they stand."

"Would he betray Red Eagle?"

"He would."

"What dark-faced treachery! I have fallen into a den of traitors, and treachery fills the very air I breathe. But the boy?"

A blush suffused the red girl's face.

"White Lasso will take him along if he goes to-night."

Lina Aiken was silent for a long time.

"I wonder where George is!" she murmured.

"The other pale-face?"

The white girl started and it was her time to blush.

"Did you hear me, Winnesaw?"

"Yes; Gold Girl loves other pale boy."

Lina's blue eyes dropped to her feet, and the crimson mounted to her temples, and tarried there until the Indian girl arose.

"You are not going to leave me now, girl?" said the blonde, imploringly.

"Winnesaw go watch traitors; she come back soon," was the reply, and before the last sound died away, Lina found herself alone.

The Pawnee girl soon perceived that her footsteps were dogged by a black shadow, and she walked directly to her lodge. After dropping the curtains, she turned, and saw the black detective approaching with the tread of the cat.

After watching him a moment, she turned and threw her-



self upon her couch like one who would soon yield to the wooings of the drowsy god.

The moonlight stole faintly into her lodge, and a stray beam fell across her face. She threw an arm across her cheeks in sleepy abandon; but peeped out under the bridge of the elbow, and saw the eyes that regarded her from the outside of the wigwam. One of the Indian's hands clutched a silver-mounted revolver, but she had no occasion to use it, for the eyes soon disappeared, and she heard their owner walking away.

She arose and gazed upon the retreating form.

It was Wolf Eyes; the peculiar gait, the crest of hawk-feathers, proclaimed his identity beyond question.

He disappeared among the shadowy lodges, satisfied, no doubt, that the object of his espionage slept suspicionless and sound.

The girl had completely deceived him, and when his form no longer obstructed her vision, she snatched a rifle from a corner, and left the lodge.

"The traitors shall not carry out all their plans," she muttered, with determination; "they may have the pale-face girls; but they shall not carry the white boy away. The Great Spirit made his pretty face for Winnesaw, and he shall not be taken from her now."

These words meant much, and the red lips closed over them with fearful emphasis, which told what a woman would dare for love.

Once the Indian girl thought of arousing the village, and thus baffle the designs which were to be carried out when the dark clouds settled over the disk of the moon; but when she recollected that desperate men would do desperate deeds, and that the entire village swarmed with plots and counterplots, and traitors of the deepest dye, she relinquished all such intentions and resolved to do it all herself.

She hurried toward White Lasso's lodge; but now two Indians guarded it, and the chief was not to be seen.

She felt that she was suspected.

For several minutes she watched the lodge, but the Pawnee did not return. She crept to the base of the structure, and heard the regular breathings of a sound sleeper.



Charley Shafer was still there.

While she listened, the whinny of a mustang reached her ears, and drove her to her feet.

The next moment she was hurrying cautiously toward the western suburbs of the village.

The whinny had told her much that was startling, and presently she saw an Indian holding three horses by the bridles on the banks of the Pawnee Loup.

Treason was hatching, and the shell would soon be broken by the giant offspring.

The girl crept near the horses, taking good care to keep to windward, and all at once she dropped in the grass, and gripped the silvered butt of the revolver which Pawnee ferocity had torn from the hand of some murdered emigrant.

It was near midnight now, and the darkest hour was at hand. The black cloud wall had blotted the moon, as it were, from the heavens, and but four stars, toward the east, still illuminated the skies.

The horses were fresh and eager to rush over the prairies, in the face of the cool breeze, that came from the west. They pawed the sod, and arched their noble necks, until the Indian curbed their ire with his voice, and made them seem statues in the darkness.

Winnesaw watched and waited with bated breath.

The consummation of treason seemed never to dawn. But what seemed hours to the girl were but minutes, and at last footsteps broke the ghastly silence.

The click, click, of rifle and revolver were drowned by the noise of the swaying grass.

Three forms joined the single Pawnee, but two bore human-shaped objects in their arms.

The next moment two Indians vaulted to the mustangs' backs, and the steed-watcher lifted the girls to their arms.

"Now the boy!"

It was White Lasso's voice, and Winnesaw was near enough to see that a tight bandage covered the boy's mouth, and that Mabel Denison and the Gold Girl were similarly secured.

The Indian addressed by the chief caught Charley Shafer



his arms, threw him upon the back of the third horse, and then leaped up after him.

"Now good-by Pawnee Loup," said White Lasso, waving his hand toward the river. "We ride to the Sioux, and with them we'll hunt the buffalo, and fight the Pawnee if he comes for White Lasso and his friends."

Quickly, then, the mustangs' heads were turned toward the north, but before the spurs touched the scarred rowels, a pistol cracked and the Indian who held Charley Shafer groaned and dropped to the ground!

The boy still retained his seat, and as the horses started forward, a slender form sprung from the grass, and threw herself before the horse's hoofs. A hand clutched the bridle, and the flash of powder drove the animal back upon his haunches. Then, before he could recover, his rider was jerked to the ground, and the hand released the bridle.

White Lasso and Wolf Eyes did not pause; but the chief turned and sent a bullet after the Pawnee girl, who darted forward as the weapon cracked.

She stooped and snatched her rifle from the grass.

"Don't, girl, you may shoot Mabel!"

Charley Shafer's hands gripped Winnesaw's arm; but he could not prevent the shot.

A wild cry came back over the prairie, and in a ray of moonlight which shot through a break in the cloud wall, they saw two forms fall from a horse.

The remaining horseman dashed on.

The young twain rushed forward.

White Lasso lay in the grass quite dead, and Lina Aiken stood over him, transfixed with horror.

Charley Shafer snatched Winnesaw's rifle from her hand; but the next instant he threw it away with a despairing cry.

Wolf Eyes and his beautiful captive had entirely disappeared.

The young adventurer staggered back with a groan.

Lina Aiken stole to his side.

"Poor Mabel," she said; "they killed her father but an hour ago, and now the second sorrow of her life begins."

The boy gritted his teeth.

"I would have been with her, to comfort and save per-



haps, had it not been for that red-skin," and, as he turned to Winnesaw, he hissed: "Girl, I hate you; may Heaven increase that hatred!"

Winnesaw dropped her eyes and turned away.

"Don't hate her, Charley, don't! she has been very kind to me."

"Hark!"

The Indian girl started forward, but paused and turned to the couple again.

"The Pawnees come!" she said. "The clouds gather but Winnesaw will stand by the pale-faces through the storm!"

The next instant they were surrounded.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### AN UNEXPECTED ACCUSATION.

WE left George Long among the devouring quicksands of the Platte, and now, after a brief absence, we return to him.

His weight, though not great, seemed to take him down, and the Indians, seeing this, set up wild yells for assistance. Meanwhile, they tugged with all their strength at the lasso, and the boy thought that they would rend him in twain. Tighter and tighter grew the lariat about his body; his arms seemed to be forced into his sides, and his breath became mere gasps, and brief ones at that.

"Let go! let go!" he shouted to the savages in the agony of mingled pain and despair. "You can't get me out! my knees are below the sand now; my feet are lumps of ice. Drop the rope, and let me sink!"

But the savages did not obey. On the other hand, they braced themselves anew, and pulled in quick, torturing jerks. The unfortunate boy's body lay on the water now, and the jerks would submerge his face in the cold fluid, which seemed destined to be his grave.

All at once several Pawnees joined the red twain, and presently five pair of hands gripped the sinewy rope.



"Steady!" shouted a new voice, and the next moment Tom Kyle, the renegade, appeared on the scene, at the head of a score of warriors.

George looked up and saw the Pale Pawnee doff his serape and plumed hat. Then he handed his pistol-belt to an Indian, and urged his horse into the fatal river.

"Pull steady!" he cried, glancing over his shoulder at his red-men. "We'll get the boy out yet—the boy who shot Red Eagle!"

If George Long could have uttered an intelligible word, he would have flung the lie into his would-be-rescuer's teeth. He saw the motive that prompted the renegade's action; he would rescue him for the purpose of covering up a dastardly crime of his own, for, as yet, the youth had not shed a drop of Indian blood.

Nearer and nearer came the renegade. His steed sunk at each step, and Tom Kyle spurred him out of the devouring sand before it could clutch its victim, and at last he drew rein beside the youth. George had sunk but a few inches since the tightening of the lasso; the Indians' strength had counteracted the work of the sand; but they could not extricate him. It wanted a strong upward pull, and that was coming in the arm of the renegade.

"You're in a bad fix, boy," cried Tom Kyle, reaching down for the motionless form lying on the water. "The Indians were about giving you up when I came, and you couldn't hire one to ride out here and try and pull you out with all the scalps in Christendom."

He caught the young Ohioan's shoulder, and shouted to the Indians on shore to loosen the tension of the lasso. Instantly it was done, and steadily Tom Kyle rose in the heavy Spanish stirrups, pulling the boy upward with all the strength he could command.

While he exerted his strength, his noble horse was sinking, and thus loosening the sand about the boy's legs. It sprung to its new victim—the horse—and as the spur-scarred flanks touched the water, George Long felt himself being pulled through the waves, while a thousand hellish cries filled his ears.

The renegade saw that he could not save his horse, and



stripping the accouterments from him, he sprung into the water and swam ashore.

A few frantic struggles settled the brave steed's fate, and at last the water rushed over the sandy grave.

"George Long fainted in the water; but four Indians rubbed him back into life, and he was jerked upon his feet.

"Where's white trapper?"

George pointed to the river, and the Indians who had fired the volley which resulted so fatally to the voyagers, declared that Frontier Shack had disappeared in one of the quicksand whirlpools which abound in the Platte.

"I guess you're able to sit on a horse," said Tom Kyle, turning to our hero. "We're going home now."

The boy declared that he felt stronger, and presently the party were riding in a full gallop toward the north. While they were mounting, a bright light illumined the cove, and several Pawnees, loaded with pelts, rode up and joined the band. The island home of Otis Shackelford was in flames, and it looked as if the entire island would be devoured by the scarlet demon, fire.

"Where is the trapper's horse?" questioned Tom Kyle, of the youth, as they rode along.

George replied by relating the story of Charley Shafer's sudden departure.

"I wanted that horse," replied the renegade, "and you must know that I am terribly disappointed. There is no such steed as the trapper's in my nation; I would have given a thousand dollars for him, any day.

Tom Kyle never dreamed that that coveted horse was to prove his death!

They rode into the Indian village an hour after midnight. Confusion filled the square, which was illuminated by torches elevated on poles, and a strange sight greeted George Long's eyes as he took in the wild scene.

He first saw Charley Shafer standing beside an Indian girl, while Lina Aiken clung to his arm, looking with pallid features upon the dark mob, which surrounded them with knives and tomahawks.

Near the chief who was haranguing the boisterous multi-



tude, when Kenoagla's party rode into the village, lay two dead bodies. The whitish lasso lying on the throbbless breast proclaimed the identity of one, while the absence of plumes from the other head, proclaimed its owner a common warrior.

Tom Kyle's eyes swept the entire scene in an instant, and he drove the spurs into his animal's flanks with an oath, which was a frequent visitor to his lips.

The speaker ceased, and a shout of triumph pealed from his lips. He had attained the object of his harangue—time; and at sight of the returning band the red-skins divided, and the renegade halted in the "square."

"The other boy, by heavens!" exclaimed the renegade, his eyes recognizing Tecumseh's young rider. "Where's the horse?"

"Safe in the Pawnee village," answered an Indian.

"Good! he's mine."

The savages crowded about the band to learn the particulars of their expedition, and terrible shouts rent the air when the bursting of the cottonwood was made known. Fierce looks were shot at George Long, who sat on the white mustang at the renegade's side; but the red-man's anger reached its loftiest pinnacle when a certain corpse was brought into the circle.

Tom Kyle had tried to prepare the savages for bad news; but his words shot bitter arrows at the youthful captive, and when the warriors laid the corpse of Red Eagle beside that of White Lasso, his secret enemy, there was a perceptible movement toward the boy. Winnesaw bent over the body.

"Back!" cried the renegade, rising in his stirrups. "Do not slay the boy in the heat of your anger. The upper Pawnees are here; they claim the two pale boys; we gave them to our river brethren when the white man's trail fell into our hands. We must listen to the upper Pawnees."

At this harangue the Indians paused, and looked toward the group of Indians whose peculiar garments told that they did not dwell on the Loup fork. Fifty stalwart fellows composed the group, and all at once the plumed heads of the chiefs came together in low conversation. The Loup and Platte Pawnees were not ancient enemies, though, at times,



they had met as foemen on the battle-field; and a few words were sufficient to rupture any peace that might exist between them.

The young white buffalo-hunters, as captives, belonged to the Platte Pawnees, and when the survivors of Frontier Shack's victory besought their Loup brethren for aid, they thought that the boys would be delivered over to them without a word.

But things had turned out strangely, to say the least. Frontier Shack had not fallen into the Indians' hands, and a ball had entered Red Eagle's brain. The chief's death had, in the event of the trapper's disappearance, been charged to the young adventurer, and the Loup Pawnees now clamored for his hot young blood, and for the gore of his white comrade.

The Indians whom Charley Shafer tried to signal while flying over the prairies on Tecumseh's back, had proved to be the band of Platte Pawnees, on a buffalo-hunt, and they had joined Tom Kyle's avengers a few minutes before the terrible explosion of the cottonwood. After the siege, they had been persuaded to accompany Kenoagla's band to the Pawnee village, where a final disposition of George Long should be made.

The whispered consultation of the Platte chiefs did not last long; their lips closed firmly over certain words, and, at length, the Samsonian leader of the party advanced from the group.

"The chiefs say, 'Give us our property!'" he said, in a firm tone; "give us the white boys and we will seek our lodges in peace."

Tom Kyle saw that he stood on the crust of a crater, and his eye calmly swept the sea of red faces beneath his perch.

The fifty mounted Plattes regarded him with anxious faces, and their hands clutched the rifles with terrible determination.

"Braves of the Loup, shall two pale boys dye Pawnee ground with Pawnee blood?" asked the renegade, hurling his voice above the clicking of a hundred rattle-loops, and the testing of twice as many arrows. "This pale spawn will die in our brothers' hands, and Red Eagle will thus be avenged."



"No ! no !" shouted White Lasso's brother, springing to his horse's back. "The slayer of Red Eagle shall die by his children's hands. If Kenoagla is a Loup no longer, let him go to the Apaches, in whose lodges he may be safer than here."

It was the first outbreak of treason, and the yells of approval that followed it, blanched the renegade's cheeks.

One glance at the Gold Girl, and he hastened to remedy his mistake.

"I spoke for peace," he said ; "not for the life of Red Eagle's slayer. The Plattes and Loups are brothers now ; shall all brotherly ties be severed ?"

"If they do not say to the Loups, 'Take the white boy and avenge Red Eagle'—yes !" cried the Little Buffalo.

The fifty daring fellows in the midst of their three hundred mad brethren bit their lips, and shook their heads resolutely.

"Then, Pawnee Loups, we keep the pale-faces or die !" cried the renegade, as the fifty threw the deadly weapons to their shoulders.

The women and children, with wild shrieks, fled from the dangerous ground and cowered in their lodges, pitiable objects of abject terror.

But still the red fingers refused to press the triggers.

Neither party seemed willing to inaugurate a conflict which might grow into a war of extermination, and the silence which reigned could almost have been *felt*.

The feelings of the captives at this dread moment can not be described. Their lives hung on delicate threads ; death, like the sword of Damocles, quivered over their heads, and they waited with throbbless hearts for the volley of fire and lead.

All at once, after three minutes' silence, the Platte chief spoke :

"Shall we have the pale boys ?"

"No !"

The little monosyllable pealed from three hundred throats as from the throat of one man.

Then the eyes that covered broad, bare breasts, dropped nearer the rifle-barrels and bow-strings ; but a voice, and the



springing of a girlish form from the body of Red Eagle, stayed the hand of massacre.

"Stay your hands, Plattes and Loups!" she cried, pausing between the divided tribes. "The pale boy did not slay Red Eagle. The ball that reached his brain came from Kenoagla's rifle!"

The effect was electrical.

Every rifle was lowered, and every eye fell upon Tom Kyle.

His face became as pale as death, and, trembling visibly, he rose in his stirrups.

"The red snake who basely shot White Lasso hates the Pawnee King. She would save the pale boys, and see him die. The warriors will not listen to her false tongue when they can read her heart."

The red-girl's voice quickly followed the renegade's:

"The Pale Pawnee's rifle shoots a big bullet," she said, calmly, firmly. "It will not enter the muzzle of the white boy's gun. Take Kenoagla's lead and try it. It will not fit the white boy's gun; but it will fit the hole between Red Eagle's eyes. And then, Kenoagla hated Red Eagle because he got the Gold Girl."

Three Pawnees sprung from their steeds and gripped the rifle which George Long had retained with a deathly grip while sinking in the quicksand.

Tom Kyle tossed them a bullet.

"Take it!" he hissed. "That girl can make the Pawnee believe any thing."

The savages who were prominent actors in the cabal which existed against the renegade, carried on the examination.

Tom Kyle's bullet would not fit the boy's gun; but it could be placed in the hole in Red Eagle's brain. It fitted that death-wound to a nicety.

The examination concluded with a yell.

The renegade handed his rifle to a chief.

"If I slew Red Eagle I would fight; but, knowing that I never aimed at his head, I surrender to my people."

The next moment he sprung from his horse, and, guarded by a score of warriors, he was hurried away.

"Curse that sharp-eyed girl!" he muttered. "I'll have



her blood for this yet! And the Gold Girl shall be mine in spite of all the red demons of the prairie! Though dethroned, the Pawnee king is not friendless!"

In the jaws of death, villains plot anew.

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## CHAPTER IX.

"YOU'VE GOT MY HORSE."

TOM KYLE was thrown into the only strong wooden structure that the Pawnee village contained, while the young adventurers were placed in a lodge and guarded by equal numbers of Platte and Loup Pawnees.

Lina Aiken was taken to the Medicine's wigwam, while Winnesaw was, also, closely guarded, for she was guilty of the death of two of her people, and she must certainly atone for the crime with her own blood. But she had baffled White Lasso, and succeeded in keeping the white boy from the smoky lodges of the Sioux. That, at least, was a source of comfort to her, when she knew that the Plattes would regain their captives, and that she would die with her lips far from his.

Such a state of affairs had never before reigned in the Pawnee village, and the Indians consequently were greatly excited over it. The guilt and innocence of Tom Kyle were discussed everywhere during the day; the Platte braves being obliged to remain to await the result of the renegade's trial, which would take place the following day. The treason smothered so long had now broken forth, and, in its strength, it swept every thing before it. The conspiring chiefs chafed at the delay; they demanded an immediate trial; but the majority of the oldest sachems counseled the postponement of the crisis, and they prevailed.

Tom Kyle still possessed many true friends, and it was true policy that their words should produce some effect.

The afternoon was rapidly fading away, when a solitary Crow Indian rode into the Pawnee village. His rifle was



thrown across his back, as the sign of peace, and his scalping knife and tomahawk were inverted in his belt. A single feather comprised his head-dress, and it was interwoven in his scalp-lock, in a curious and somewhat artistic manner. He was an Indian of middle age, but the thick painting hid many wrinkles, and several vermilion lines on his massive breast revealed the presence of arrow or lance scars. His leggings, as well as the sides of his horse, dripped with water, which proclaimed that he had crossed the Loup fork at its deepest point, and he busied himself in arranging the drenched fringes of his nether garments, with a view to enhancing his appearance in the eyes of his Pawnee brethren.

He found himself besieged by hundreds of women and children, long before he reached the council square; but he resolutely pushed his animal through the masses, nor did he draw rein until the warriors gathered about and demanded his name and errand.

A singular smile played with the Crow's lips as he gazed into the fierce faces that surrounded him, and, all at once, he shook his head and put his finger over his lips, which he drew close.

The Pawnees exchanged looks of wonder and awe. They seemed to comprehend that their visitor was a mute.

Then one of the chiefs undertook to discover the Crow's errand, and, with a few motions of his hands, the visitor bade the Pawnees form a great circle, which was done.

Instantly new life seemed to inspire the Indian; he performed a buffalo-chase so admirably that the Pawnees clapped their hands, and made the air ring with "wewas," their word for "good!"

The Crow's actions told his auditors that he and a number of his countrymen had embarked upon a great buffalo-hunt, which had proved quite successful, but disastrous so far as the Indians' welfare was concerned. They had lost a number of their party, and he had pursued the buffaloes to the borders of the Pawnee country. His comrades, grieved by the loss of two sub-chiefs, who had been killed by wounded bulls, had returned, while he had embraced the opportunity of visiting his Pawnee brethren for the first time.

His looks, his carriage, pleased the savages, and they



gathering about him with delight, mingled with profound respect. The American Indian always respects an unfortunate person; they pity any one whom the Great Spirit has touched, as they express affliction in any form, and they received the mute Crow with dignified courtesy, mingled with sympathy for his loss of hearing and speech.

After performing his journey from the Crow village beyond the Black Hills to the Pawnee lodges, the Indian produced several pieces of white bark, and charcoal pencils.

Upon the former he drew the picture of a sleeping bear, and then pointed to himself.

Then he sketched Tom Kyle; held the picture up to the Pawnees, and looked inquiringly around.

This was not a strange question, for the renegade's person and position was well known to the Crows, and it was quite natural for the Indian to inquire about the king of such a great nation as the Pawnees.

His question was answered by signs and picture-writing, and he expressed great surprise at the unexpected turn affairs had taken.

Then he dismounted and confided his horse to the care of the officiating chief. This announced his intention of remaining to witness the renegade's trial and doom.

A lodge was given him, food placed at his disposal, and the curtain fell upon the Crow all alone.

He did not seem to hear the loudest sound, for a gun had been discharged close to his head, and he had not exhibited the least curiosity regarding the shot.

After remaining in the Pawnee lodge for the space of an hour, Sleeping Bear raised the curtains and stepped out. The shades of night were gathering from the four cardinal points, and the mute wandered aimlessly, as it seemed, about the village.

He encountered a warrior whose age reached his own, and they walked, at the Crow's request, toward the corral, which contained perhaps a hundred horses. These animals were newly captured or stolen ones, while the old Pawnee steeds were browsing along the banks of the Loup fork, or sleeping on the prairie near the village.

The Crow's companion was suspicious, and he watched his



nation's guest narrowly, as they walked along, conversing by signs. Sleeping Bear did not notice the Pawnee's suspicious nature; he seemed intent on telling the story of a famous chase after the wild horses, and at last they reached the corral.

The horses were biting and fighting each other like wild beasts, and many already bled from wounds inflicted by hoofs or teeth.

Prominent among them appeared a magnificent iron-gray whose fore shoulders were branded with the letter S. This horse seemed the king of the corral, for the others fled around the inclosure at his approach, and many were cowed by his flashing eyes.

The two spectators watched the conqueror in silence, and the Pawnee's eyes dilated with triumph, when the horse suddenly galloped toward them, and poked his neck forward at the Crow with a low whinny of delight!

The next moment the mute found his throat gripped by long fingers, and the Pawnee was bearing him to the ground with quick ejaculations of success.

"The horse has betrayed the white hunter," hissed the Indian. "He never leaves the Pawnee village, never!"

The keen edged scalping-knife quivered over the tufted head before its owner could recover his equilibrium, for the Loup's action was the work of a single moment.

All at once the Pawnee felt his antagonist's muscles swell to the bulk of mill-ropes, and the next minute Sleeping Bear sprang to his feet like the upward flash of the rocket, as sudden and as resistless.

The Pawnee tried to shriek; but the cry died in his throat and the Crow's hand choked him into the realms of insensibility. Once the red hand opened partially, but suddenly closed again, held the Pawnee at arm's length, then let him drop.

One dead Indian lay at the edge of the corral!

During the conflict the Crow, as he styled himself, did not utter a word, and after the victory he maintained the dogged silence which had kept his lips sealed since his entrance into Pawneedom.

The iron-gray still stretched his neck over the corral, and



the victor approached and patted it affectionately, but did not utter a word.

The tarry of the Crow in the village, and the scene at the horse-pen, had occupied several hours, and the night was well advanced when the last incident occurred. His absence was not missed; several Indians had seen the Pawnee join him, and they, no doubt, thought that they were yet together about the corral.

At length Sleeping Bear walked slowly back toward the village, and entered his lodge, but a moment later he emerged again.

But few Indians were to be seen now, and the hunter joined a small group standing near the lodge wherein slept Lina Aiken. The savages noticed him and proceeded with their conversation. The expression on the Crow's face told them that he was a true mute, for they said words designed to startle him, but without effect.

"The Plattes will take the pale boys to-morrow," said one Indian. "We do not want them. We will say that Kenoagla killed Red Eagle, whether he did or not, and his blood will satisfy our people."

It was agreed among the conspirators that, guilty or innocent, Tom Kyle should die on the morrow, and it was evident that none of the conspirators believed him guilty. They argued that he dared not slay Red Eagle, when the chief had been a professed friend, and they could not tell what kind of rifle George Long might have used while in the trapper's hut.

After a while the group dispersed, and the visitor returned to his hut, or lodge.

Half an hour later the door of Tom Kyle's prison opened slowly. It was opened by one of the guards, and an instant later the renegade came forth unbound.

"Where's the girl?" he asked, in a low tone.

"At the corral."

"Good! now let us hurry. If Kenoagla is found here to-morrow, he'll be roasted or shot, as sure as fate."

"And the braves who help their king."

"Yes, Indians, the traitors would scorch you, too."



With stealthy steps the trio moved toward the corral in the darkness, and when they reached the inclosure, they were joined by another Indian who held Lina Aiken in his arms.

"We'll succeed better than White Lasso," whispered the renegade, when his eyes fell upon the Gold Girl. "He can't steal women worth a curse. Tom Kyle's an old hand at the business. Now," he said, in a louder tone, but the savage who had waited for his coming clutched his arm.

"Hist! Kenoagla."

"What's up?"

"Somebody's among the Pawnee's horses."

"The devil!"

"Rattlesnake heard him when he came here; but he has not heard him for a minute."

"It's some thieving Omaha," hissed the renegade, "and he has stolen away ere this. Catch the animals."

In a few moments four horses were captured, and led from the corral at the furthest side. Among them was Tecumseh, the iron-gray.

"By heaven! the gray is mine at last!" exclaimed the renegade, in a low but exultant tone, as he fondly caressed the steed on whose back the marks of Frontier Shack's Spanish saddle were plainly visible. "Here, Rattlesnake, hold the horse till I mount, and, Big Eyes, you take the girl."

The Indian grasped the bridle, and Tom Kyle threw himself upon the iron-gray's back. The next instant he gave Tecumseh the spurs, and the horse dashed away, leaving the three Indians standing beside their steeds.

They dared not follow Tom Kyle! in the last moment their courage had signally failed them, and they looked into each others' faces with mingled shame and cowardice.

Tom was going to the Apaches, but they dared not ride into those southern wigwams. They had stolen Apache horses; they were known, and Tom, they now feared, could not protect them there. Perhaps, when they had served his purpose, he would desert them. They knew the treachery of the man they had served.

The renegade glanced over his shoulder and saw the motionless forms in the starlight.



"The greasy cowards!" he hissed. "That's Pawnee nature, to desert a fellow when he needs help; but I don't turn back now. I'm riding from a stake, to authority over a thousand Indians, who will not conspire for a fellow's gaudy clothes."

He sunk the spurs deeper than ever into Tecumseh's rowels, and glanced down into the pale face that looked up to him with a smile of malicious triumph.

Flying from a stake to a kingdom!

It was a proud moment for Tom Kyle.

At last he reached a small tributary of the Loup fork and plunged into the water.

Tecumseh gained the furthest bank, when three dark objects sprung from the grass.

"Ho!"

Tecumseh halted suddenly, as if stricken by an arrow.

Tom Kyle drew a pistol.

An Indian sat bolt upright on a horse, not twenty yards in his front, and he saw that a rifle covered his heart.

He discovered more than this. He recognized Sleeping Bear, the Crow, whose visit to the village he had lately witnessed from his prison.

The Crow had seemed a mute; but had not the exclamation which brought Tecumseh to a halt fallen from his lips?

The mental interrogative was soon answered to the renegade's satisfaction and astonishment.

"Tom Kyle, you've got my horse!"

The fugitive king saw all now.

Sleeping Bear was Frontier Shack!



CHAPTER X.

SHOT BY HIS OWN RIFLE.

"TOM KYLE, I say you've got Tecumseh!"

The reiteration of the trapper's declaration followed a minute's silence.

"Well, what if I have?" hoarsely grated the White Pawnee."

"I want 'im."

"You do?"

"Certainly; get off!"

Tom Kyle gritted his teeth till they fairly cracked. Then he lowered half unconscious Lina Aiken to the ground, but remained on the iron-gray.

"There's the girl!" he said.

"But I want the horse. Tecumseh is worth more to me than all the girls in America."

"What will you do with me? Shackelford, I have saved your life."

"And you would have saved it night before last if your devils had caught me, too," was the sarcastic rejoinder. "But to business; get off that horse."

Shackelford's voice was as stern as a winter storm, and the renegade saw his head drop once more to the rifle-stock.

"I mean business, Tom Kyle. We can't wait here. If you will be stubborn—"

The fugitive from Indian vengeance interrupted the hunter by springing to the ground.

Frontier Shack now rode slowly forward, the remaining horsemen following his example.

"I pulled wool over the Pawnees' eyes this time, Tom," he said, familiarly, and with a broad smile. "The water tells me that I make a handsome Indian. You see I can play the Crow pretty decently, for I've trapped with the varmints but I never caught enough of their lingo to gabble it off to advantage. Wonder what them Pawnees 'ad say if they could hear Sleeping Bear talking like any other folks?"



He paused, and Tom Kyle saw fit to put a question.

"How did you know I was escaping?"

"I'll tell ye. I first put an end to the two greasers what guarded the boys, hyar, an' then I sneaked around for the girl, for one o' these chaps wouldn't budge a peg 'thout her. I found her nest empty, an' I knew that you had a hand in the pie. I knew that you would take my horse, because you've wanted him for these several years. I daren't go back to the corral, for I thought I would run ag'in' you, and there 'd hev been a game blocked. We caught Pawnee horses on the prairie, and struck out for the Platte."

"But how did you know that I would ride southward?"

"I knew your situation, Tom Kyle. The Pawnees hev told me about the volcano that they were manufacturin' beneath your feet, and I knew that you had good inducements to join the Apaches. So we came here and waited. This is the old Apache trail. You war a fool for takin' it to-night."

"I know it," said the renegade; "but what can't be cured must be endured, I suppose."

"It seems so; but we must be movin'. Allow me to tie your hands."

The Pale Pawnee submitted to the operation with muttered curses.

Then he was placed upon the horse, which the trapper had ridden from the Pawnee village, and his legs were lashed to the sinewy girth.

"Where are you going?" he asked, as Frontier Shack vaulted upon the back of his favorite steed once more.

"To Fort Kearney."

A pallor flitted across the renegade's face.

He did not want to go the frontier station.

"Shackelford, this is the lowest kind of revenge."

The trapper smiled.

"I can't take vengeance for the Government," he said.

"Tom Kyle, I'm going to turn you over to the authorities, and I hope that they will deal justly with one who has massacred so many helpless emigrants."

"Well, do as you like, but let me tell you now, Otis



Shackelford, that, should I escape, I will take your life if I am obliged to hunt you a lifetime."

Another smile curled the hunter's lips, and then the ride over the prairies continued in silence.

Fort Kearney, at that time, was a weak frontier post; but it awed the savage in its vicinity, and kept him classed among the comparatively harmless denizens of the West. The cannon had a terror for him, and, as yet, he had not learned to laugh at the blue-coated soldiery, who stood between him and the great father at Washington.

The western post, in question, was situated about sixty miles from the point where Frontier Shack arrested the flight of the Pale Pawnee, with his prize—the Gold Girl.

Shackelford took a trail not much frequented by Indians, but noted for being crossed and trodden by buffaloes.

The quartette rode rapidly beneath the stars, which dotted the azure vault, and wore a senescent aspect, which the trapper noted with a half frown.

He almost wished that the night might be interminable.

At last day broke upon the vast prairie, and found the fugitives still many miles from Fort Kearney.

Objects assumed shape gradually, and the first one to speak was Lina Aiken, who sat before the trapper on his old steed.

"We must hurry," she said, her eyes riveted upon a dark mass which seemed to rest against the eastern horizon. "A storm will burst upon us soon."

"A storm, girl? Why, where's the clouds?"

"Yonder."

"That's buffalo."

Lina uttered an exclamation of wonder.

Presently the thunder of hoofs was heard, and the army of buffaloes advanced directly toward the Platte, almost within sight of whose waters our fugitives were.

The herd contained thousands, and the noise of their feet as they rushed over the plain almost drowned the voice of the spectators.

"They're makin' for water," remarked Shackelford. "There's a place hyarabouts where the river's cl'ar of quicksands, and them knowing beasts hev discovered it. It's further down river, though, so we'll sit hyar till they pass."



I  
e  
in our front. Now, boys, look out for white bufflers! If  
e  
thar's any in this world, ye'll see 'em in that herd."

it  
g  
A crimson flush stole to the cheeks of the young adven-  
turers, and they exchanged smiles without glancing at the  
trapper.

2-  
o  
Suddenly the line lengthened, and excitement faded from  
the young Ohioan's eyes.

m  
They turned to the trapper.

"We're in danger!"

ty  
nt  
Frontier Shack did not reply, but watched the animals  
whose extended ranks endangered their lives to an imminent  
degree.

as,  
ed  
p-  
"We stand between them and the water," said Tom Kyle,  
coolly, and with infinite pleasure, despite his situation.  
"They are coming like lightning, and they could catch us be-  
fore we could reach the river."

"I know it," replied the hunter; "but we must not die  
here."

he  
"We can't fire the prairie, although the wind is in our  
favor."

ak  
d.  
"No; the grass is green now."

rk  
"Then what will we do?"

A  
It was Lina Aiken's question.

"I can save the party. I could show you the Pawnees'  
plan for baffling buffalo."

"We can ride through the ranks."

"You can not, Shackelford: those ranks must be three  
hundred deep. Through the ranks of a common herd we  
might ride to safety; but not through those ranks."

m  
os  
The hunter reseated himself in the saddle, after survey-  
ing the bisonic legion, that rushed forward, completely in-  
flaming them, crazed for water to cool their tongues.

ei  
ce  
Such a horde threatened to drain the Platte.

"That's so, Tom; we can't ride through them. If they  
war wild horses we'd fix them, but—heavens! what thunder!"

pr  
ck  
gade.  
"We've got to die when we can be saved," grated the rene-  
gade.

It  
pa  
"No! there!"

Tom Kyle stretched his limbs, and uttered a low ejacula-  
tion when he found himself free.



"Now show us the Pawnee plan."

"I will, God helping me," said the renegade, with determination. "Your rifle."

Frontier Shack did not hesitate, but tossed Tom Kyle his rifle.

With a "Now," which sounded terribly triumphant at that perilous hour, the fugitive king rose in his stirrups and surveyed the approaching herd, whose glaring eyes and long red tongues were now distinctly visible.

What would the renegade do?

The spectators held their breath and fastened their eyes on him.

He seemed to be looking for a break in the dark-brown ranks.

Suddenly his eyes lit up with a strange, fierce fire, and Frontier Shack, who also had risen in his stirrups with a revolver clutched in either hand, saw what had rejoiced the renegade.

The buffaloes had extended their ranks until the files were not dangerously deep, and two huge bulls, who were fighting most furiously, promised to divide the herd.

"Now, Tom—"

The trapper suddenly paused, for the renegade had wheeled in his stirrups, with an oath.

"This is the Pawnees' plan!" he hissed.

There was the report of a rifle; the revolvers fell from Shackelford's hands, and he dropped on Tecumseh's neck without a sigh—without a groan!

A cry of horror burst from the lips of the spectators of this brutal deed, and Lina Aiken found herself dragged from beneath the body of her preserver by a hand that gripped her like the jaws of a vise.

With the girl in his arms, the renegade wheeled toward the buffaloes. He rose in his stirrups again, as he executed the movement, and a moment later he was standing on the saddle with the ease of a circus-rider.

One arm supported Lina Aiken and the trapper's rifle, while the other held his magnificent serape aloft, and flaunted it in the faces of the thirsty herd.

Straight at the quadrupedal ranks the Pawnee "buck-skin"



darted, and the renegade accompanied the waving of his serape with yells that might have frightened the fiends in Pandemonium.

The young adventurers' eyes looked over white cheeks, and George Long's first intention was to cock his rifle.

"Don't shoot!" cried his companion, putting forth his hand. "Our safety lies in following him. If he rides through the ranks, why can not we?"

The hammer fell gently on the percussion-cap.

"Forward!"

With a glance at Frontier Shack, whose hands gripped Tecumseh's mane with the tenacity of death, the two boys shot forward in the wake of the renegade.

Their safety did lie in following Tom Kyle, who uttered a light laugh when he glanced over his shoulder and saw them giving their Pawnee horses spur and rein.

The two heroes imitated the flying king as nearly as possible.

They stripped themselves to their jackets, and rising in the stirrups, they waved their garments at the bisons.

For many moments it seemed that they were riding to a terrible death beneath short horns and stony feet; but all at once, that dreadful thought gave place to a wild cry of safety.

The renegade rode almost directly toward the rising sun, and the rich gold trimmings of his Spanish cloak dazzled the eyes of the beasts; and at length the brownish ranks divided.

A yell of triumph pealed from Tom Kyle's lips, and a minute later he passed the jaws of death! The young buffalo-hunters followed him, and at their side dashed the iron-gray, as eager to bear his motionless master through the dark ranks as horse well could be.

The renegade's steed was no mean racer. He distanced the other horses, and when the buffaloes had been baffled, he was almost beyond rifle-range.

He shouted something back which the young Ohioans could not catch, and then they saw him drop into the saddle again and turn his horse's head in a south-westerly direction.

"We can't overtake him, George," said Charley Shafer. "We must stop here."



They curbed their mustangs with little difficulty, for the beasts were jaded, and a quick "'Ho!" brought Tecumseh to a sudden halt.

"I wonder if he's dead," said young Shafer, riding up to the trapper, while his comrade gazed, with gritted teeth and clenched hands, at the villain who bore from him, with terrible rapidity, the beautiful being whom his young heart had learned to love.

Frontier Shack still lay motionless on the iron-gray's back, and the horse turned his head with a softened look as the youth put forth his hand.

Tecumseh's neck was crimsoned with blood; but the boy raised the trapper's head with flutterings of hope.

That head seemed a lump of lead; but as Charley lifted it high from the blood-clotted mane, the expressionless eyeballs seemed to move. He looked again, this time with an exclamation of joy!

The dark eyes moved again, and the hands released the horse's mane.

"George! George!" cried the overjoyed boy, "he lives! he lives!"

Called from the contemplation of the dark speck oscillating against the distant horizon, George Long bounded forward.

"Where's the bufflers?"

"At the river."

"Where's that devil?"

"Out of sight now," said George, with a sigh.

Frontier Shack was silent for a moment.

"He's showed me the Pawnee mode of beating bufflers," he said, at length, with a smile which, on his bloody face, looked ludicrous in the extreme; "but if I don't show him Frontier Shack's mode of beating renegades, then may the wolves howl over my grave when the grass dies ag'in! Are ye ready, boys?"

"Yes."

"Then we move."

"To Fort Kearney?" asked George, who saw that the trapper possessed no weapons.

"I don't see Fort Kearney nor the Stars and Stripes till I wipe out that cussed pale whelp."



"And save Lina?"

"Yes."

"And Mabel?"

"Yes!"

The boys grasped the trapper's hands.

"Boys, look hyar," said Frontier Shack, solemnly, "you've got fathers and mothers; I haven't. I had parents once, but they're up yonder. I kin do what I'm going to do alone. I might get along better without you; I really think I could. Now suppose I guide you to Fort Kearney, and that you wait till I bring the girls back. I'll do it, so help me Heaven! I want yer parents to see ye once more, and I tell ye truly that yonder, across that river, lies the valley of death, and yonder," pointing toward the land of the Sioux, "the highlands of destruction."

"Sir, dangers can not frighten us," said Charley Shafer, breaking the profound silence that followed the trapper's last words. "We are going with you, for we have determined to rescue our friends from the red-skins or die in the attempt. You can not guide us to Fort Kearney; there!"

The old trapper slowly shook his head, and muttered in a low tone:

"If white bufflers hed a-kept out o' yer heads! Si Gregg hed no business to write sech a lie!"

He loved the boys.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### A VOICE IN THE NIGHT.

NEAR the close of a beautiful day, an Indian sat in a saddle on the banks of the Arkansas, not far from James' Peak, and gazed at an object which rapidly approached from the north-east.

That object appeared to be a horse, and the Pawnee watched it intently, with shaded eyes, as it rose and fell like a ball on the plain that separated them.

He did not speak or look at the beautiful girl whose waist



his bare arm encircled, and held before him on his black steed.

She, too, saw the object which had attracted the savage's attention, and when its identity was plainly revealed, the Pawnee started and uttered an exclamation of wonder.

Mabel Denison looked up at him, questioningly, curiously, but did not speak.

"The Pale Pawnee seeks the Apaches," said the Indian, Wolf Eyes, in a low tone, which still bore traces of inward astonishment. "Why does he ride thither now? Has the storm of the chiefs broken overhead? and has he stolen from the Pawnees at night, and ridden like the wind from the lodges where he once reigned like a king?"

The approaching horseman answered Wolf Eyes' questions, for when he suddenly checked the career of his beast, the Pawnee saw the burden the "buck-skin" bore. He glanced at Mabel, but, seeing that she had not recognized Lina Aiken, he kept his lips closed, and executed the Pawnee signal of peace with the rich sash which he had plundered from some New-Mexican hacienda in days gone by.

A peculiar motion proclaimed his identity, and presently the renegade rode forward again.

They met on the river's bank, and a sharp cry of recognition rose from the throats of the captive girls.

Lovingly they but forth their arms for an embrace; but the distance was too great for them to feel heart beat against heart. Tom Kyle saw this and rode nearer Wolf Eyes.

"There, Lina, embrace your friend," he said, softly, lifting his captive forward. "God knows I wouldn't deprive you of such happiness at this hour. I thought Wolf Eyes far away from this spot, and I expected to meet the Old Harry here as much as the chief."

The girls encircled each others' necks, and mingled their tears—tears of joy at meeting in the darkest hour of adversity, when not a hand was near to chase the clouds away, and show them the sun.

"I thought you were with the Sioux," said Tom Kyle, addressing the chief, who watched the captives with a stoicism that proved him as devoid of feeling as a stone.

"When Wolf Eyes saw White Lasso fall, he knew that h



dared not ride into the wigwams of the Sioux alone ; so, he turned his horse's head toward the Apaches' land, and, behold ! he has met his white brother journeying to the same place."

"Yes," answered the renegade. "The storm broke at last over my head, and for my life I had to fly. The Apaches have waited for me long ; Tarantulah has sent me offer after offer, and I told him that, in the hour of need, I would fly to his lodge, and teach his people war, as I have taught the Pawnees. Oh, the rich haciendas I can ride through ! Oh ! the golden crosses I can snatch from gilded shrines !"

Wolf Eyes caught his king's enthusiasm, and uttered an exclamation of joy.

"If Gold Feather still lived, Wolf Eyes would not ride to Apache land," said the Indian, suddenly relapsing into seriousness again.

"Gold Feather is dead ?"

"Yes," and there was a flash in the midnight eyes. "Wolf Eyes found him wounded once on the banks of the Platte—wounded by a buffalo bull ; and he tossed him into the water. The Manitou's lights shone then, and Wolf Eyes saw his enemy sink to the swallowing sand. He rode toward the Pawnee lodges to slay Wolf Eyes, but the buffalo stretched him by the clear water.

"Then, of course, you'll be safe among the Apaches, and I will stand by you. But, if Gold Feather was alive I could not rescue you from his vengeance."

The Pawnee shook his head.

A moment later the girls, who, during this time, had conversed in low tones, were gently separated by the renegade.

Before departing, they surveyed the land that stretched from them to the north and east, and the last rays of the setting sun fell upon the two captors fording the Arkansas, with their horses' heads turned toward Apachedom.

Long, lone and drearish days had intervened between Tom Kyle's escape from Frontier Shack, and meeting with Wolf Eyes on the bank of the Arkansas.

He had encountered wandering bands of Indians ; but, aided by his knowledge of plains life, he had managed to



elude them. Once he narrowly escaped running into an emigrant train, which Lucy Aiken had signaled, hoping thereby to escape from his clutches. The signal was seen, a number of men had pursued the fugitive, but he outgeneraled them completely.

After leaving the Arkansas in their rear they did not fear pursuit. Tom Kyle knew that the boys would not attempt to follow, when their friend the trapper was dead, for he believed that his ball had penetrated Shackelford's brain, instead of merely grazing his temple, and rendering him half-paralyzed, as was the case. And, with the start which he had from the Pawnee village, he felt assured that his red enemies could not overtake him, even if they were to ride their swiftest horses.

"They didn't want my blood, particularly," he would murmur, when he thought about such matters as I have just penned; "they wanted me out of their way, and they ought to be satisfied now. Ha! didn't I outwit Red Eagle! I never shoot at a creature twice. He won't step into the Pale Pawnee's moccasins, and that leads me to think that blood will flow over the question, 'Who shall succeed Tom Kyle as ruler of the Loups?'"

The renegade and his red companion gave their steeds but little rest. They crossed the mountains in safety, and at last descended to the beautiful plain-lands of New Mexico.

Here they were compelled to catch fresh horses, a duty which the rifle and lasso performed, and after breaking the steeds, an operation which lasted several days, the journey was resumed.

One morning, as the sun crept lazily over the mountains that border Apache-land, the riders reached their journey's end.

Boldly they rode into the great Apache village, amid demonstrations of joy, for the renegade's rich clothing had caused his recognition, and Tarantulah had bidden his braves receive him as a great ally.

The council-square swarmed with savages of all ages and conditions, and when the twain drew rein, a loud shout of triumph broke forth.

But, suddenly, Wolf Eyes uttered a low but terrible cry



of terror, and drawing back, he threw his horse upon his haunches.

The cause of the Pawnee's agitation was easily discoverable.

A young chief, whose head-dress consisted of a single feather, dyed to an ochereous tint, was fitting an arrow to a bow-string, and his dark eyes were riveted upon Tom Kyle's red comrade.

Tarantulah saw the action and sprung forward with a sharp, quick cry of command, to arrest the frenzied arm.

Wolf Eyes still forced his horse back; but when he discovered that stalwart Indians blocked his way, he tried to shield his heart with Mabel Denison.

But the shaft left the bow as he threw the murdered agent's daughter before his brawny breast, and he fell from his horse with a loud cry!

Gold Feather complacently unstrung his bow, while he watched Tarantulah snatch Mabel from under the mustang's feet.

The old grudge between Pawnee and Apache had been settled at last.

Tom Kyle surveyed the sea of upturned faces. There existed, so far as he could see, no enmity against him.

It is an Indian's right to slay his enemy wherever he meets him, and Gold Feather had exercised that right. He could not be arrested, by savage law; it was justifiable homicide in the red-man's eyes—not cold-blooded murder, needing an expiation.

Tarantulah found a lodge for the pale captives, and when Tom Kyle had departed, after wishing them happiness in their new quarters, they came together in a sweet embrace.

"Now, Mabel, captivity begins in terrible earnest," said Lina Aiken. "The day for rescues has passed, for who is there to hunt us now?"

Mabel Denison looked up into the pale, sympathizing face that bent over her, and answered, in a calm, determined tone:

"I do not despair, Lina. While there's life there's hope. We have friends among these savages."

"Friends!" echoed Lina Aiken, astonishment depicted on



every handsome lineament. "Friends among fiends! No, no, Mabel! You take wishes for reality."

Fair-eyed Mabel Denison glanced at the shadow of their guard, which fell into the lodge, and drew nearer her sister.

"We have one friend, at least, among the fierce Apaches," she whispered, "and that friend is the chief whom we have heard called Gold Feather."

The night that succeeded the second day of the captives' sojourn in Apachedom was most beautiful to contemplate.

For hours Mabel Denison and Lina Aiken stood behind the lodge curtains, and gazed through the narrow opening at the stars that glittered in the azure deep of the sky.

They thought of friends who, secure in happy homes, far toward the rising sun, slept and dreamed, perhaps of them.

Such thoughts sent more than one tear down the girls' cheeks, and, as they turned to the skin couches which red hands had prepared, a sigh for the hopes, the joys, the pleasures of the past, escaped their lips.

Sleep quickly followed their lying down, and near midnight Mabel awoke from a strange dream, wherein home and deserts were wildly commingled.

A slight noise, like the scratchings of a 'coon, against the back of the lodge, saluted her ears. With her heart in her throat, she crept from the couch without disturbing Lina, and put her ear against the side of the structure directly opposite the noise.

Now she knew that a knife was at work, and at last the thin blade slipped through the bark and grazed her cheek.

Then came a low voice.

"Do the pale girls sleep?"

"No!"

A slight exclamation of joy followed.

"Gold Feather's mouth is full of good news. The pale-faces who love the silver lilies are in the mountains! Can the pretty squaws be ready to run for the hills?"

"Oh, yes, at once!" they both cried.

"Can the white squaws strike down the guard, if he opposes the way?"

"Try me!" said Mabel, with sudden fierceness which showed how much she was willing to dare to escape.



No, "Then when you hear three owl-hoots, come forth, and Frontier Shack and myself will be near at hand for the rescue," and with that the mysterious visitor glided away.

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## CHAPTER XII.

## THE BLOW FOR FREEDOM.

A HALF-HOUR passed, of intense anxiety to both girls. Then they distinctly heard a noise again in the wigwam's rear.

Gold Feather is not able to take the girls out through the village. The guard sleeps soundly. Go forth; take his gun, and if he wakes not, make for the hills with soft steps. Gold Feather will guard the way."

Parting the curtains, she peered out, but clouds obscured the stars, and the blackness of darkness brooded over the village like some monster eagle. The guard sat beside the door, half-asleep as it seemed, for his head had fallen between his knees, and his rifle lay on the ground.

A moment later the curtains were drawn aside, and Lina stepped out into the pure night air.

Mabel followed, and as she dropped the curtain she stooped to deprive the guard of his gun.

Her slender hand clutched the barrel of the weapon; but the butt, which she did not see, struck the Apache's foot as she drew it toward her, and starting from his sleep, fully awake in an instant, he leaped to his feet.

Lina Aiken uttered a low cry of horror and sprung backward as the rifle shot upward, held by hands which, though a woman's, were nerved with fearful determination.

The Apache took in the situation at a glance, and, without a cry, he strode forward. He saw the clutched rifle, and perhaps he caught the dark eye that fell upon him warningly, for he threw his hand up to break the blow. But the girl was too quick for him; the butt of the weapon struck his head with a dull thud, and he staggered toward the lodge.



Once he tried to recover, and had almost succeeded, when the rifle descended again, and then he sunk to the earth like a stricken bullock.

"Now, Lina!"

The girls joined hands in the darkness, and started for the mountains. They had miles to travel before dawn, and the path to the fastnesses were beset with dangers.

An unseen hand seemed to guide them, for they avoided the somber lodges with an ease scarcely ever equaled, and had proceeded to the suburbs of the village when the barking of several dogs, quickly followed by the yells of Indians, attracted their attention, and riveted them to the earth.

"They've discovered the guard!" whispered Lina, breathlessly.

"No," said Mabel, as the yells increased, "they've caught a white man. Hark!"

"By heavens! Shackelford, I thought I had finished you! I never missed a shot before, in all my life; but we'll take care that your life ends now. Where are the boys?"

The girls heard a coarse laugh, which Lina Aiken knew came from Shackelford.

"What shall we do now, Mabel?"

"Continue our journey. They have not caught the two boys—only Frontier Shack, as the hunter is called. We may yet escape."

Again they started forward; but soon realized that all was lost.

Every lodge was pouring forth its living humanity, and the fugitives suddenly dropped to the ground, where, with wildly-throbbing hearts they awaited developments.

The winds blew from the mountains, and brought distant sounds distinctly to their ears.

Suddenly they heard the tramp of horses, and knew that some persons were flying from the Apache camp.

"Mabel, listen! we were so near *them*!"

A sigh, a low "yes," told that the fugitives were on the brink of safety and yet did not know it.

Charley Shafer and George Long were hurrying back to the mountains.

In the shadow of a lodge the girls continued to crouch,



until every Indian seemed to have reached the spot where the daring trapper was held in durance vile. Then they rose to their feet and started forward again; but were quickly seized—this time by the squaws themselves, who, prowling around the lodges, had discovered the girls, and a minute later full twenty furious hags surrounded and held the girls, while a legion of feet approached with quick, impatient strides.

Foremost among the warriors was Tom Kyle, minus serape, sword, hat and moccasins. A pistol-barrel glittered in either hand, and he pushed his way through the captors with a series of oaths.

"So my birds tried to get away!" he said, with a grim smile of satisfaction, when the torches revealed the pale faces, whose cheeks touched each other, almost. "Well, you find it extremely difficult to fly from Apachedom, eh, my eastern finches? Here, women, give me my own. I return them to the cage, and take good care that they shall not escape again."

He tore the girls from their captors, and he and the Apaches started back toward the center of the village.

"By George! girls," he exclaimed, stepping nearer Lina Aiken, "that trapper is in the village. I thought I had finished him; but, somehow or other, I didn't, and he has guided them two boys to Apache land. I tell you that he never sees another night. He's got to die to-morrow, as sure as my name is Tom Kyle, and that, girls, is a fixed fact!"

The girls were silent, and, after a long period of quietude, the renegade spoke again:

"Who killed the guard?"

"I did, sir."

It was Mabel Denison who spoke.

"If the Indians find that out, it may go hard with you. Even Tom Kyle may not be able to save you. Among the Apaches, it is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. If they accuse you, girls, of the death of the guard, deny it to the bitter end. They do not know that he is dead."

The girls soon afterward found themselves back in their old lodge again. Then the renegade departed, after whisper-



ing a few commands to the three Indians who now guarded the captives.

Borne to the council-square, Frontier Shack was soon pinioned to the single post ever ready there for its captive, and the horrid fire-torture. The old hunter well knew his danger but flinched not, nor betrayed the least sign of uneasiness when the howling throng pressed around him.

The death of the guard immensely excited the chief Tarantulah. *Who* had killed the warrior? This secret he tried to wrest from Shack, but the white man only laughed in his face.

"As if I would tell, even if I knowed!" was his contemptuous answer.

"And you have been helped by some red-man in your visit to the Apache land. Who is he, that we may burn him with you?" demanded the chief, fiercely.

"What do you take me for, Indian?" cried the trapper. "A durn fool, I s'pose. When I go back on anybody, call me a craw-fish."

Tarantulah bit his lips, and started toward his braves.

"The traitor is Gold Feather!" he cried, "and he has not been seen to-night."

"He rode to the mountains when the Manitou's light hung in the sky," answered a sub-chief.

"But he returned," said another.

"To his lodge, Squatting Bear! Hunt him down, warriors! He is the traitor! The red-man with a treacherous white skin!"

"What's that, chief: Gold Feather not a true red-skin?" asked the renegade, with evident surprise.

"Gold Feather is a white man!"

"I would never have dreamed that. How long has he been with you?"

The chief studied a moment.

"Twenty summers."

Tom Kyle started at the reply.

"I had a brother once," he said. "My father took him to Mexico about twenty years ago, for he and mother quarreled and parted. But the Comanches caught and killed them. No, Gold Feather is not my brother; he—"



An Indian suddenly paused before the twain, and broke the renegade's sentence.

It was Gold Feather.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE SWOOP OF THE AVENGER.

"GOLD FEATHER is here. Is the chief angry with him that he should put the warriors on his track?"

"Yes," he cried; "why did Gold Feather ride to the mountains, and meet the pale-faces in the shadows of the crags? Let him speak the truth, for Tarantulah knows all."

"Gold Feather's skin is white," was the firm reply, "and when he accidentally met the pale-faces among the hills, his heart went out to them, and he resolved to help them, even against the Pawnee king."

"Then Gold Feather told the trapper where Kenoagla slept?"

"Yes."

"Traitor!" hissed Tarantulah; "the Apaches shall mete out a terrible punishment to the dog that betrays."

With yells a score of Indians set to work to plant another stake, which operation was completed in a short space of time, and the young traitor was quickly lashed thereto.

"This is quite a change of fortune, Shackelford," said the renegade, approaching the trapper, and facing him with a devilish leer. "I guess I will not go to Fort Kearney with you. I am quite content here."

"Had it not been for those bufflers you'd 'a' swung in Fort Kearney ere this," responded Shackelford.

"What are they waiting on?" he cried, impatiently, turning to an old chief who stood at his side. "I'm getting anxious to see the fun."

"Gold Feather wants to die a pale-face," was the reply, and the paint of the Apaches must be washed from his body before the strong fire comes."



"Well, it's natural for him to want to die decently," grated Tom Kyle, "and I shall curb my eagerness for the burning with the impatience to see what kind of a looking white man the traitor makes."

Presently several warriors advanced to Gold Feather, and applied strong alkali-water to his person. Then, after thoroughly soaking his skin, as it seemed, they rubbed him with coarse skins which served as towels.

Beneath this operation a startling metamorphosis manifested itself.

Gold Feather was a white man once more!

Tom Kyle stood off, and gazed on the singular spectacle; and stepped to Tarantulah's side.

"Now let them die!"

"When the pale-girls come."

"What! must those sensitive creatures witness this horrible sight?" cried the renegade. "No, chief, rather let them remain in the lodges, and when the fire dies out let them view the blackened trees."

"Tarantulah is sachem of the Apaches," was the stern rejoinder. "Kenoagla is an ally, not yet a great Apache chief; but he will be, soon. The pale girl must fling the lie into Gold Feather's teeth before he dies. Ha! they come."

The next moment the Apache ranks divided, and Mabel Denison and Lina Aiken were led into the circle.

Though daylight was not far distant, it was very dark, but innumerable torches revealed the terrible scene, and clothed it in a garment which day could not own.

"Sir, must we witness this torture of two brave men?" asked Lina Aiken, when the renegade stepped to her side. "Have you no authority here? I find your boastings to be lies; yourself the lowest of men—an Indian's slave!"

Tom Kyle bit his lip, and muttered a few words which the Gold Girl could not comprehend, for his voice shook with passion, and could scarcely be heard.

"Girl," cried Tarantulah, at this juncture, suddenly pausing before Mabel Denison, and gripping her slender arm, "who slew Long Arrow, your Apache guard?"

"These hands," was the undaunted reply, and Mabel put



forth her hands, which touched the sachem's wampum. "I killed him—struck him twice before he fell."

"Long Arrow saved Tarantulah's life."

The chief's whole frame shook with emotion.

"Another stake!" he cried.

Tom Kyle stepped between him and his new victim.

"The pale girl's mind is wandering," he said. "The minions of White Lasso, the Pawnee, slew her father, when they drove her from the lodges. Her head is cracked; she does not know what she is saying. It was the trapper who slew Long Arrow."

The executioners, who had caught the renegade's words, paused and looked at Tarantulah.

The chief heard Tom Kyle patiently, and his anger fled, when he turned to them, slowly, deliberately.

"Another stake!"

The Pawnee king turned away with an oath.

"By George! I'm nobody here, after all," followed the evil word. "I'm no better than a dog in Tarantulah's eyes, when the devil creeps into his heart. To-morrow night, Miss Aiken and I will take another ride into the city of Mexico. They will burn Miss Denison; I can't help her longer."

When the words "another stake," uttered for the second time, fell from Tarantulah's lips, Mabel Denison crept forward and threw her arms about her fair, tearful companion in misfortune.

"Lina, we part forever here," she murmured, as Lina's lips touched her cheek, and glued themselves there. "The stake is my portion; what yours is, Heaven will disclose!"

"No! no! Mabel; if you die here, so will I," was the determined response, couched in a calm tone. "What were life to me without you, girl? No, no, dear Mabel; our troubles end together. Chief! Tom Kyle is my captor, I know; I am his, by your Indian law; but he is a white man, and has no right to me; so give me leave, chief, to perish here with my friend. Better—oh, a thousand times better this than a life with the outlaw, Tom Kyle!" she cried, with a touching pathos.

"Kyle! Kyle!" cried Gold Feather, from his stake. "Is your white name Kyle?"



The renegade was too astonished to speak for a moment, during which time he moved nearer Gold Feather.

"Yes, my name's Kyle—Tom Kyle," said the renegade, at last. "What's your real name?"

"Ned Kyle, if I haven't forgotten the past," was the reply.

Tom snatched a torch from an Indian and shot forward like a startled horse.

"If there's a scar on your shoulder, you're my brother," he cried; and the next moment a loud cry welled from his throat.

He dropped the torch, which revealed a scar on Gold Feather's shoulder, and his knife began to sever the young chief's bonds.

This action was met by furious yells, and the Indians drew their knives and tomahawks in a menacing manner. The dread circle, bristling with iron and steel, also contracted.

"Gold Feather is a traitor—he shall die!"

"He's my brother!" grated the renegade, in a fierce, determined tone, and he shielded the marked man with his body. "Apaches, listen to me. Many moons ago—"

The vengeful yells drowned Tom Kyle's words, and he stopped in the beginning of a narrative and cursed the red fiends from the depth of his heart.

"I've been a devil, I have!" he shouted; "but I won't desert my brother. I'll stand by him to the last, and if you get him, 'twill be over the King of the Pawnees."

"Tom Kyle, you're a man once more. I wouldn't shoot you now for the world."

It was Frontier Shack who spoke, and over the flames that were now lighted up before him, he looked upon the striking tableau.

The Indians were furious.

Tom Kyle had not a red friend in the village now, and over all the monster death spread his black wings and slowly descended.

The chord of life was being rent in twain for many.

Nearer and nearer came the Indians; the outer ones pushed the front ranks, and Tom Kyle saw that he was to be taken alive.



His days of sovereignty were ended. He who had controlled a nation could not now control a single man.

"You're near enough now!" he shouted, raising the revolver which his right hand clutched, and a click, click at his elbow told him that Gold Feather was about to use the weapon which he had thrust into his hand. "We've got twelve loads for you, and twelve wigwams shall be without warriors, by heaven, if you come two paces nearer."

The determined visage awed the Indians, and several involuntarily shrunk from the muzzles of the weapons which the red-man dreads.

But the outer circle, with wild yells, still crowded their brothers forward, and the renegade's finger touched the trigger, when a war cry, which palsied many a savage heart, drowned every shout of Apache vengeance.

Tarantulah turned; the red circle broke, and in places disappeared like mist before the sun.

The tramp of hundreds of horses was mingled with war-cries of the most startling nature, and the flaring of torches revealed Pawnees, Ogallahs and Omahas riding like demons of destruction through the village.

"Great heavens!" cried Tom Kyle, as he cut Frontier Shack's bonds, "what an hour of destruction this is!"

"I never saw its like," was the reply; "and if we've got to die, Tom, let us die like men!"

"We will; but look yonder!"

Shackelford looked, and beheld Charley Shafer and George Long lashed to horses whose bridles were held by a giant Ogallah.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### TECUMSEH'S VICTORY.

THE confusion that followed gave the precious moment for action to the whites.

"Now, Tom, be a man, and help us out of this!" cried Shack



"I'm with you, Shack, now, to the last!" cried Tom. "Take the girls and make at once for the boys on the horses. I'll revolver every red-skin in the way; so come on!" and forward they all started.

True to his promise, Tom Kyle shot down the Ogallals guarding the boys, and in a few moments more all were mounted for a desperate dash for the hills, miles away.

Already the cries of the victors were ascending from the field of slaughter; it was wonderful that the Apaches had withstood the avalanche so long, and the shouts of the northern barbarians drove the whites from the scene of their little victory.

Tom Kyle rode a fiery black mustang, and held Mabel Denison before him, while Lina was encircled by the strong arm of Frontier Shack, who rode beside Charley Shafer.

"How did the greasers come to catch you chaps?" he asked, as they dashed over the plain that lay between life and death.

"We waited for you last night until we knew that something terrible had transpired in the village," was the reply. "Then we thought of rescue, but a thousand feet drove us back to the mountains, but ere we could reach them, the Pawnees came out from their fastnesses, and we fell an easy prey. Not so easily after all," and the boys' eyes lit up with pride; we fought the whole troop for a while, and five empty saddles told the story of the battle."

And while they conversed as they rode, Tom Kyle and Ned were making their explanations.

Gold Feather thus questioned his brother:

"Whither do you wish to go?"

"I want to see mother once more."

"Then we go to Mexico."

"To Mexico? I left mother in Baltimore, Maryland. Why should she be in Mexico?"

"She would not believe that the Comanches had killed you. She yearned to see her stolen boy again, and came thither to hunt you."

A tear stood in Ned Kyle's black eyes.

"But these people with us? They do not want to go to Mexico?"



"No, we go without them."

"'Tis well; I know the trail, and we will safely reach mother's side. Oh, Tom, I never dreamed of such a meeting."

The renegade smiled and glanced at Mabel Denison, who had been transferred, at her own request, to a seat before the youth whom she loved.

"Look here, Ned," and Tom Kyle's voice sunk to a whisper. "Don't you want a wife?"

"I leave one in the Apache camp."

"Of course," responded Tom, "but I'm talking about a white wife."

"I may find one in Mexico."

"Pshaw! can't you see what I am driving at? I say, don't you want that black-haired girl behind us?"

"I don't know. She has a lover already."

"Don't be so accursed conscientious. The other girl is mine, and you might as well take the brunette."

Gold Feather was silent; the battle between right and wrong was going on in his mind, and when he looked up, the keen eyes of his brother were fastened upon him.

"Tom, we can't get them without spilling pure blood, and then we have no right—"

"Pish! who cares for a little blood?" interrupted the Pawnee king. "You didn't the other day, when you dropped Wolf Eyes. Come, Ned, don't be so infernal scrupulous. Work with me. I owe that trapper one. He tried to take me to Fort Kearney, and if I ever get there I'll swing, p'r'aps. He'll try to get me there now, and you, too, boy. He's a veritable devil who smiles when he plots against us. I hate him; he hates us both!"

"True, Ned?"

"As true as mother's heart. We'll take the girls?"

"Ned will help Tom."

A sigh followed the youth's words, and his lips closed with the fearful determination behind it.

Half an hour later the party reached the mountains, and, far above the level plain, Tom Kyle drew a highly ornamented field glass from beneath his jacket, and turned it toward the Apache village.



A moment later an oath burst from his lips. He had descried a black mass moving toward the mountains.

Shackelford took the glass.

"Chased, by Joshua!" he exclaimed; "but if we manage it right, they won't catch us."

"No," said the renegade, "but we must prepare for a long race. They're far away, as yet, and we have a few moments here."

The next moment they had dismounted, for the purpose of tightening their steeds' girths. Frontier Shack was busily employed in this operation, when a loud neigh saluted his ears, and looking down the pass, he beheld a great iron-gray horse trotting forward.

"Tecumseh, by Joshua!" he exclaimed. "Boy, I thought he was captured with you."

"No!" answered young Shafer. "I should have told you. Tecumseh broke from us when we rode from the village last night; and his wild neighings soon died away to our left."

"Dash me! if we ain't lucky," ejaculated Shackelford, leaving the Ogallah mustang, and a moment later he gripped the bridle of his own dear horse.

In the exuberance of his joy, he was stroking Tecumseh's neck, when a shriek, followed by Tom Kyle's stern voice, saluted his ears!

He turned and beheld Gold Feather covering the young buffalo-hunters with a brace of revolvers, while the renegade's rifle was aimed at his own head. Kyle sat bolt upright in the saddle.

"Shackelford, we're going to part here," said the Pawnee king, "and I guess we'll leave you to the buzzards. Curse your heart! you tried to take me to Fort Kearney once, but I didn't go, eh, Shackelford? Now, say your prayers. Ned, count twenty-five in the Apache tongue, and, at the end of that count, we'll empty our weapons and go to Mexico."

The White Apache began in a low tone, and the doomed ones looked at each other in silence.

There seemed no escape from death now; it had grown into a palpable monster and was very near.

Frontier Shack stood beside the iron-gray whose jaws



champed the bit impatiently, and his eyes regarded the determined renegade.

Lina Aiken and Mabel Denison stood spellbound in the mountain-pass, feeling that they were the innocent cause of the dreadful tableau.

The "count" had reached the thirteenth numeral, when Frontier Shack slowly stepped from his horse. As he executed the movement, his broad palm struck Tecumseh's shoulder, and, with a fearful plunge, that would have overthrown the best human equilibrium, the horse shot forward!

Tom Kyle blocked the narrow pass; his brother stood beside his horse, and they uttered ejaculations of horror when they saw the trapper's steed's intention.

Gold Feather lifted the revolvers from the boys, and poured two shot at point blank range into Tecumseh's front.

The brave horse reared, as blood spirted from the wounds, then staggered forward, on his hind feet, and came down with a crash upon Tom Kyle and his horse!

The renegade shrieked at the top of his voice, when he saw his fate; but the cry was broken by Tecumseh's attack, and he found himself beneath his steed, crushed as it seemed, into the stony earth!

"Back, hunter," cried Gold Feather, as Frontier Shack sprung forward with drawn pistol; but the trapper would not obey.

Once, twice, the White Apache delivered his fire; but ere he could send a third shot after the heart he would cleave, a report that came from a place above their heads, saluted the ears of all, and he staggered back upon the dying horse.

"Tom Kyle, you've deserved all this," said Frontier Shack, drawing the renegade from his terrible position. "I intended to part from you in peace, for I owed you much; but all is over now. You are dying!"

"I know that, Shackelford. Your horse's foot struck me squarely in the breast. I never dreamed that he would prove my death. Look out for the Indians."

The trapper took the field-glass, and brought it to bear upon the plains below.



"They're not far off, now," he said, lowering the instrument. "Tom, we must go. They'll never find you alive."

"Thank Heaven for that!"

Then he tried to rise, but in vain; he fell back again, his hands clawed the bloody earth, and he died, gasping:

*"Thank Heaven for that!"*

Tecumseh was already dead. Ned Kyle's shot had finished the career of the noble horse, and Frontier Shack clipped a bunch of the iron-gray mane, ere he turned away:

"The old horse remembered his training to the last," he said, proudly. "He knew that that slap on the shoulder meant 'charge!' and dash me! didn't he go for them rascals lively?"

He brushed a tear from his eyes, as he thrust the lock of equine hair into his bosom, and a few moments later they had left the spot.

But they had scarcely cleared a hundred yards when the trapper suddenly drew rein. A human figure had dropped into a clump of bushes beside the dusky trail.

"Indians!" he ejaculated, riding slowly forward again; but a moment later he uttered a new cry.

The figure had crept from the bushes, and, with their support, was standing erect.

"Winnesaw, upon my life!" exclaimed Charley Shafer, recognizing the Pawnee girl who had loved him during his captivity.

The party soon reached the girl's side, and saw at once that she stood on the brink of the dark river.

"Winnesaw escaped from the Pawnees," she said, in feeble tones, and she sought her mother who lives among the Apaches. She reached the mountains, and in the darkness she met the bear. They fought; Winnesaw conquered with her knife; but the beast tore her limbs. She is dying; she shot the pale Indian when he fired at the white trapper."

She sunk to the earth from exhaustion, but Frontier Shack raised her up.

"Gold Girl," she gasped, her eyes falling upon Lina Aiken, "Winnesaw love you. She loves boy with black eyes, too. But she give him up now; she go to light the fires in Red Eagle's lodge in Manitou lands!"



Frontier Shack sprung into the saddle again.

"Look here, youngster, don't this mean you?"

The speaker was a United States soldier, and he thrust a small piece of paper into the hands of a handsome youth who sat near an old hunter within the walls of Fort Kearney.

The boy held the paragraph before his eyes, and read:

"STILL UNKNOWN: We learn that the whereabouts of the sons of Messrs. Shafer and Long, importers, on Fourth street, still remain unknown. It is generally believed, now, that they have reached St. Louis, and joined some emigrant caravan at that place. A standing reward of \$1,000 is offered for their persons, or for information that may lead to their recovery."

"Read that to me, boy!" said the hunter, as the youth looked up with a tear in his eye.

The youth complied.

"Well, I see you're worth five hundred dollars to the old folks," said the old man, with a smile. "And I guess I'll claim the reward. But, I do wish you could take some white buffler hides home with you, anyhow. This has been a wild-goose chase, Charley, hasn't it?"

"Yes, so far as white buffaloes are concerned," replied the boy, with a deep blush.

"Well, what have you gained by it?"

The youth drew nearer the hunter, and glanced at two beautiful girls standing in the little barrack yard, conversing with a youth of about their own age.

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed the man. "You needn't tell me, Charley. This has not been a wild-goose chase for you two boys. You've gained something worth a million billion of buffler hides, and I'm going to stay in Cincinnati till I see you hitched."

"Oh, Frontier Shack, we owe you so much!"

"If you talk that away, I'll be dashed if I go back with you. You don't owe me any thing. Boy, I thought that this thing was going to turn out all right, when the boat struck the sunken island that terrible night, and throwed George among the quicksands. I can't tell how I managed to git into the boat again, but heaven helped me, I guess. The water carried me too far down-stream to help George then.



Golly ! how 'stonished I war to find him in the Pawnee village, with you at his side. But every thing has turned out right. I'm a lone man now," he continued, after a pause. "Tecumseh and Massasoit are gone ; they war my brothers. Peace to their ashes !"

A month later a happy reunion took place in the Queen City of the West, and smiles came back to faces to which they had long been strangers.

The runaways had returned, and when their overjoyed fathers asked to behold the results of their escapade, they led the plain-found girls blushing forward.

"These girls are better nor white buffler-skins," said Frontier Shack, in his rough way. "The boys hev won 'em, and if they don't git 'em, Frontier Shack will raise a rumpus and clean the ranche."

Into the palatial homes of the Cincinnati merchants the fair girls were warmly welcomed, and, in due time, a double wedding proved a fitting sequel to the wild hunt for white buffalo-skins.

After the grand affair above mentioned, Frontier Shack returned to the Plains, but, several years ago, he left them in disgust.

He said that the railroads were "spoiling a trapper's fun" in the wild West, and so, seeking retirement, he came to spend the remaining days of his life with those whose lives his bravery had saved.

I need not say that he met a hearty welcome in two stately mansions in Ohio's proudest city, and to this day he relates to attentive children the thrilling story which has called forth the service of my humble pen.

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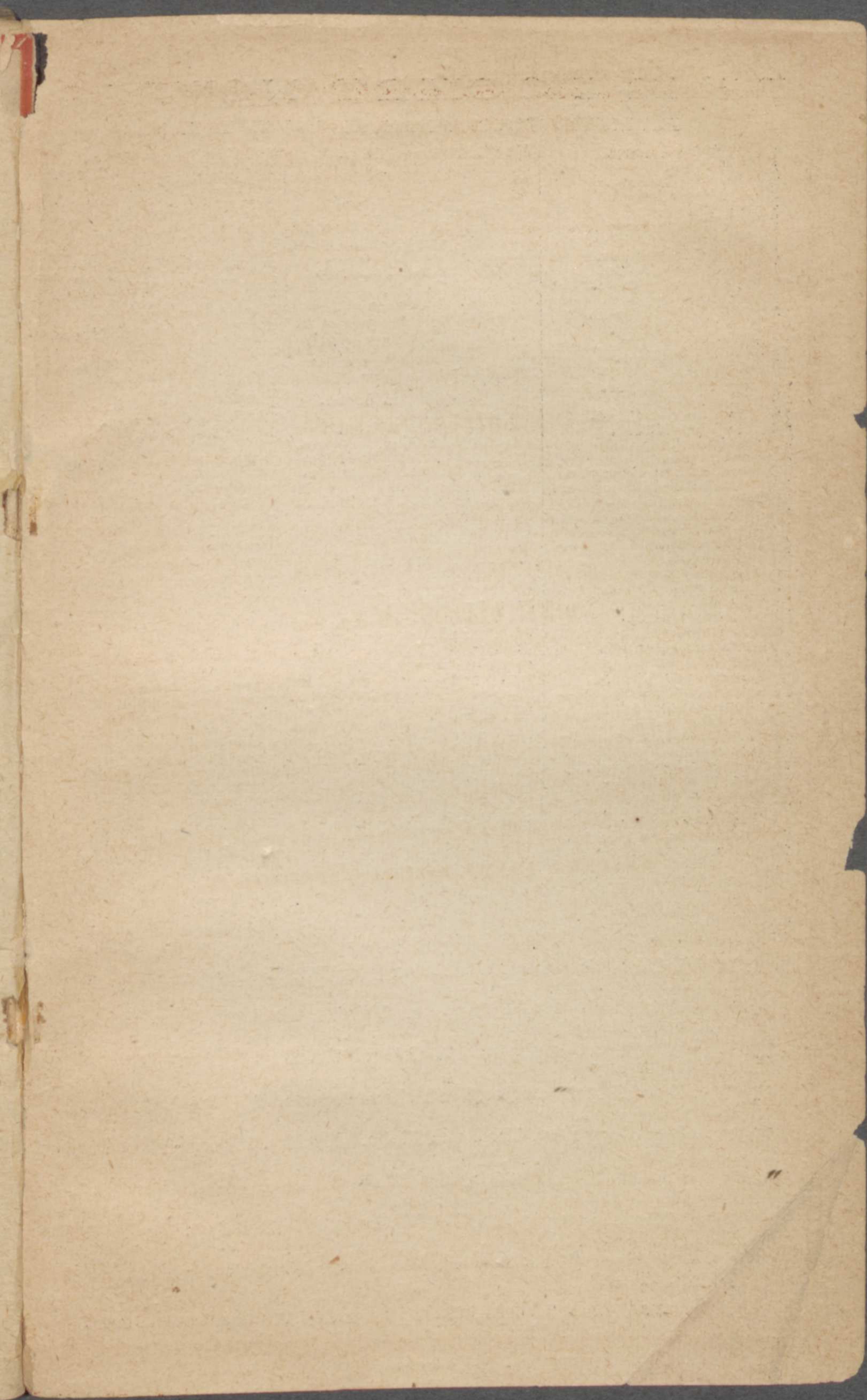
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